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Bohemian Resonance: The Beat Generation and Urban Countercultures

in the United States during the Late 1950s and Early 1960s

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Bohemian Resonance: The Beat Generation and Urban Countercultures in the United States during the Late 1950s and Early 1960s

by

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Acknowledgments

As a graduate student, I have often felt like a beatnik: shaggy, unshaven, hunched over yet another book, chain smoking and swilling coffee. That the experience has been enjoyable as well as educational is the result of the people I have met along the way, some of whom played a more direct role than others in my intellectual and personal development, but all of whom are important.

As an undergraduate at Southwest Missouri State University, I had the good fortune to work with highly dedicated teachers. In particular, Thomas Dicke in the history department and Bill Burling in the English department inspired my passion for history. Although they each had very different teaching styles and personalities, they made me think about America, past and present, in entirely new ways, and for this I am very grateful. While earning a master's degree at Texas A&M, I was fortunate to work with John Lenihan, Robert Resch, John Canup and Arnold Krammer, all of whom, in various ways, encouraged me to improve my thinking about history.

While earning the doctorate at the University of Texas, I have worked with many people who assisted me both professionally and personally. Graduate seminars with Robert Crunden, Judith Coffin, David Crew, William Goetzmann, Neil Nehring, Penny von Eschen and Kevin Gaines opened up new worlds of cultural history and extraordinary conceptual terrain. To my eternal regret, Robert Crunden died before I had formulated even the vaguest idea for a dissertation on the beat generation and postwar countercultures, and I have often wondered what he would think of the following pages:

"Ginsberg and Kerouac couldn't write their way out of a paper bag," or words to that effect, but then, as always, he would point out what I had and had not accomplished with any particular argument, and my thinking would undoubtedly be the better for it. Fortunately, I could draw upon the expertise of Robert Abzug, Judith Coffin, Richard Pells and Neil Nehring, all of whom offered invaluable input on my work as it evolved over the years. Most important, I found an excellent adviser in Janet Davis. Janet combines analytical rigor, a genuine desire to help her students, and a witty personality that make working with her a true joy. Her willingness to go out of her way to assist students is extraordinary. Janet is quite simply the best adviser a person could have.

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Of course, even in graduate school one must eventually put the books down, and when I realized this I was lucky enough to find some of the most incredible people in the world. At A&M I met Mark Klobas, who over the years has listened patiently to my political diatribes and exhibited a wonderful willingness to help me track down hard-to-find books, as well as being a great friend. While at A&M I also met Jack Lala, who is one of the best friends a person could ever hope to have. Brilliant scholar, inspiring teacher, and drinking buddy extra ordinaire, Jack's combination of empathy and skepticism has sustained our friendship over the years. At Texas I met Andrew Falk, Rebecca Montes, Ed Donovan, Andrew McFarland, Stephen Berrey and John Troutman, all of whom have been both insightful colleagues and wonderful friends throughout the years. The Writers' Bloc–may it's resplendence yet again grace humanity!–served both intellectual and social functions during its brief but illustrious heyday. More seriously, Stephen and John helped me through a difficult turning point in my life, and their continued emotional support over the years has been invaluable.

Outside the hallowed halls of academe was the wonderful city of Austin, Texas, and in the person of Cara Harrison I found, quite simply, the most amazing friend one could ever have. Her humor, grace and intelligence–that variety that comes not from reading but from living–amazes me to this day. She is supportive, passionate, and knows how to have fun, and being able to confide in her about the vagaries of life means a great deal.

Like a any beatnik, I gravitate to coffeehouses. I thank the powers that be (whoever or whatever they are) for Mojo's Daily Grind. Before it was sold (and Wade, the owner, reportedly used the money to fund travel around the world), it was the best coffeehouse in Austin. Open 24 hours, it featured art work by local painters, musical performances, wonderful murals, and the finest ice mocha anywhere. Moreover, it attracted many of the colorful personalities that make Austin the wonderful city that it is. I used to go there every Sunday morning to write in my journal, watch the sun rise, read Charles Bukowski, and soak up the ambience of a space that was uniquely conducive to lively conversation, quite reflection, or just hanging out. Sometimes I got a psychic charge just knowing that Mojo's was always open, should I never want or need to go there. And I often felt such a need, for somehow the place was a sanctuary, a place to unwind, recharge, and reflect.

Finally, I must thank my parents, Bob and Lynn Starr. Their ability to discern what is important from what is not amazes me to this day. They always meet challenges that come their way–many of which emanate from my direction–with a serious yet

lighthearted outlook that continues to serve as a source of inspiration.

Bohemian Resonance: The Beat Generation and Urban Countercultures in the United States during the Late 1950s and Early 1960s

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In 1957, the obscenity controversy surrounding *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg and the instant success of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac precipitated a mass-media sensation over the beat generation and its subculture of idiosyncratic writers and artists. As a result, urban districts in which avant-garde intellectuals congregated experienced a rapid influx of new residents and frequent visitors, many of whom did not identify as poets or painters but felt a strong affinity for the adversarial attitudes and ways of life that permeated bohemian enclaves. Focusing on the North Beach district of San Francisco and the Venice area of Los Angeles, this study examines how bohemian alternatives resonated in America during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Bohemian countercultures in Los Angeles and San Francisco challenged pervasive social norms and catalyzed both personal freedom and collective political action. California bohemians

rejected consumerism, homophobia, restrictive gender roles and racial segregation, and they mobilized to defend their communities from repression by police and municipal governments.

Chapter one argues that mass-media depictions of the beat generation simultaneously exaggerated and sanitized the oppositional potential of bohemians, yet also disseminated the adversarial culture of avant-garde intellectuals to a national audience. Chapter two examines how a broad array of people valorized the alternative milieu of urban bohemias. This chapter also explores how the owners of bars and coffeehouses sought simultaneously to exploit growing public interest in the beat generation and create environments in which poets, painters and musicians could share their work with diverse audiences. Chapter three argues that bohemian districts were countercultural spaces in which restrictive gender roles, homophobia and racial prejudice never disappeared but were challenged to an extent that was often far more difficult to sustain in other parts of the metropolitan landscape. Chapter four assesses the ways in which municipal governments and law enforcement officials repressed the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the strategies bohemians developed to fight such oppression and defend their access to public space.

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Introduction

For many Americans, the writers of the beat generation heralded a watershed. After serving in the Army for two years, a soldier returned to America in 1958, read *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, and "soon came to regard the Beats as my generation. I felt the same keen sense of identification with them that thousands of others my age did, and I had the same feeling that I was lucky to be in on the beginning of something big, if only as a spectator."[1] Similarly, a woman recalled that "by the end of the 1950s, many thousands of us throughout the United States felt that we belonged to the Beat Generation," and "even if we all didn't go on the road with Kerouac or take off our clothes with Ginsberg or get stoned with [Herbert] Huncke," there was still a sense of belonging to "a community of disaffected Americans."[2] Such communities were especially visible in urban enclaves where writers, artists, musicians and their hangers-on congregated. Surveying American bohemianism from the vantage point of Greenwich Village, one observer noted in the early 1960s that the "Village idea" of "uninhibited" and "intensely creative life" had spread to "coffeehouse districts, off-Broadway enclaves, art colonies, boutiques, art-movie houses, [and] jazz spots" that "light up Dallas, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Chicago, Seattle, Cleveland, Philadelphia, even Washington, D.C."[3]

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[1]Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 3.

[2]Ann Charters, "Introduction," in Charters, ed., *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (New York: Penguin, 2001), xvi.

[3]Leo Lerman, "The Village Idea," *Mademoiselle*, June 1962, 69.

Assessing the cause of this proliferation, a coffeehouse habitue in Los Angeles opined that people who gravitated to bohemian enclaves felt "real angst about the society" and sought "to make sense of things" in environments where like-minded individuals congregated.[4]

The obscenity controversy surrounding *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg, the instant success of *On the Road*, and the ensuing mass-media sensation over the beat generation brought the alternative assumptions and behavior of avant-garde intellectuals to a national audience. As a result, urban bohemian districts experienced a rapid influx of new residents and frequent visitors. This growing public interest in bohemianism was visible throughout America, as bars and coffeehouses that featured poetry readings, art exhibitions and performances of jazz and folk music proliferated in large cities and university towns. In order to understand the significance of bohemianism in postwar America, it is necessary to analyze not only intellectual but also social and cultural history, in particular the urban districts outside New York City that attracted avant-garde artists and writers as well as individuals who empathized with the attitudes and ways of life that beat writers personified.

This dissertation argues that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, bohemian countercultures challenged pervasive social norms and catalyzed both individual liberation and collective political action. Focusing on North Beach in San Francisco and the Venice area of Los Angeles, this study analyzes how urban districts attracted people

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[4]Personal interview with Lionel Rolfe, 9 August 2001, Los Angeles, California.

who did not identify as writers or artists yet felt an affinity for the adversarial beliefs and practices that seemed to permeate neighborhoods where avant-garde intellectuals congregated. Public spaces such as bars, restaurants, nightclubs and coffeehouses functioned as community institutions, places in which people gathered to share ideas, express themselves and gain exposure to new attitudes and ways of life. California bohemians challenged postwar social norms of consumerism, homophobia, restrictive gender roles and racial segregation, enabling a wide array of individuals to attain levels of autonomy that were difficult to sustain in other parts of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Furthermore, conservative civic organizations, police and municipal governments reacted to the presence of homosexuals and especially African Americans in bohemian districts by launching campaigns of intimidation and harassment, targeting the owners and patrons of specific bars and coffeehouses. In response, bohemians organized to defend their access to public space, forming neighborhood associations, allying with civil liberties groups to fight discrimination in the courts, and holding public protests to draw attention to their cause and galvanize support.

Bohemians, Beats, and Countercultures in Post-World War II America

Bohemianism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in conjunction with the rise of urban, middle-class cultures in capitalist societies. The first use of "bohemia" to denote a way of life occurred in Paris during the 1830s and 1840s. "Bohemien" was a French term for gypsy that was used to denote youthful artists who were contemptuous of

bourgeois respectability and lived as marginal vagabonds (many French people believed gypsies existed in this manner and came from the Czech province of Bohemia).[5] Bohemianism expressed conflicts within the emerging middle-class culture of France, as the dissolution of the ancien regime destroyed a stratified system of estates and guilds, and unleashed a more commercialized society of competitive individuals struggling for upward social mobility at a time when clear definitions of and parameters for bourgeois identity had yet to be established.[6] Thus bohemia and the bourgeoisie emerged simultaneously. If Paris was the birthplace of French bohemianism, in the United States it was New York, which by the mid-nineteenth century eclipsed Boston and Philadelphia to become the largest sea port and the national center of publishing.[7] Here too commercialization and identity were crucial. Emerging writers no longer needed the critical endorsement or financial support of Boston literary elites, as New York publishers realized that marketing was the most important factor in determining sales.[8] This enabled aspiring literary intellectuals to identify as writers even if they had not won critical

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[5]Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (1986, reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5, 23-24. On French bohemianism, see also Cesar Grana, *Bohemian versus Bourgeois: French Society and the French Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

[6]Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 10-11.

[7]Christine Stansell, "Whitman at Pfaff's: Commercial Culture, Literary Life and New York Bohemia at Mid-Century," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 10 (Winter 1993), 109, 122.

[8]Ibid., 121-122.

acclaim, and such individuals often gravitated to Greenwich Village bars like Pfaff's, where eccentric women such as Ada Clare and controversial poets like Walt Whitman intermingled with coarse laborers and well-heeled aesthetes, all of whom shared an interest in art, literature and politics.[9] Middle-class New Yorkers increasingly regarded the exotic personalities and behavior at Pfaff's as spectacles of urban life that they could glimpse as occasional customers, while aspiring writers, whatever their class background, regarded the bar as a place in which to interact with like-minded individuals. Thus, bohemianism was an established feature of cultural life in New York by the mid-nineteenth century.[10]

For most historians, the key episodes in the history of bohemian countercultures in America were Greenwich Village in the 1910s and the hippie movement of the late 1960s, while bohemians in the 1950s appear as little more than a colorful blip on the conservative cultural radar of the McCarthy era. Historians often portray Villagers as an eclectic avant-garde that ushered in new ways of thinking about modernist art and literature, working-class politics and gender roles.[11] Similarly, the hippies are typically

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[9]Ibid., 112-115. See also Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America* (1933, reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 14, 88.

[10]Stansell, "Whitman at Pfaff's," 109-110, 115-116; Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders*, xxv.

[11]The best study of Village bohemianism during its heyday in the 1910s is Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2000). Stansell moves beyond modernism as a series avant-garde intellectual trends to explore the social and cultural history of intellectuals. She analyzes how bohemians enacted their modern identity in everyday life, particularly the attempt of both men and women to make gender relations more equitable.

regarded as a central component of the upheavals of the late 1960s.[12] Yet when assessing

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She also examines bohemians' relationship with the broader society, including, for example, their writing for mass-circulation magazines, which made radical labor unions more understandable and less alien for middle-class readers (by combining sensational accounts of police brutality and the exoticism of ethnic workers with a human-interest emphasis on children separated from their families). For an older but excellent analysis of how New York intellectuals, many of them Village habitues, sought to unite bohemian rebellion and radical politics, see Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (1961, reprint, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), chaps. 1-4. Studies that emphasize the failure of Village radicals to unite art and politics, or synthesize the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, include Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of The Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Robert E. Humphrey, *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village* (New York: Wiley, 1978); and Irvin Marcus, "The Interaction between Political and Cultural Radicalism: The Greenwich Village Revolt, 1910-1920," in Jerrold M. Starr, ed., *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 51-78. Studies of the Village after World War II are far less numerous, but see Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders*, chaps. 29-30; Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), chaps. 15-16; and Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). For a fascinating autobiographical account of how a young leftist intellectual tried to balance bohemian rebellion and Communist politics in the 1920s, see Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), 229-416.

[12]Secondary accounts of the hippies are less numerous, but the field is rapidly growing. For an overview of the hippie world view, see Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991). The best history of the hippies remains Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (1984, reprint, New York: Vintage, 1985); see also Barney Hoskyns, *Beneath the Diamond Sky: Haight-Ashbury, 1965-1970* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997). An excellent collection of newer work is Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Several dissertations examine the hippies, including Michael William Doyle, "The Haight-Ashbury Diggers and the Cultural Politics of Utopia, 1965-1968" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1997); David McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture and Counterculture: A Social History of the Hippie Counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1998); and Tim Hodgdon, "Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983," (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2002); and Jill Katherine Silos,

bohemianism in the 1950s, historians limit their focus to a handful of beat writers who foreshadowed the presumably more important hippie phenomenon but exerted little immediate influence, beyond sparking a beatnik fad of black clothing and lackadaisical poetry.[13] Essentially, scholars reduce bohemianism in the Eisenhower and Kennedy years

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"'Everybody Get Together:' The Sixties Counterculture and Public Space, 1964-1967," (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 2003). For an idiosyncratic but insightful history of bohemianism in America and western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Richard Miller, *Bohemia: The Protoculture Then and Now* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977).

[13]The secondary literature on the beat generation is also voluminous, the overwhelming majority of it confined to literary criticism and biography. The best book-length literary study remains one of the first–see John Tytell, *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). For an excellent critical and biographical overview of major figures, see Ann Charters, ed., *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America. Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 16 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983). Almost all biographies focus on the holy trinity of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs–among the best are Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (1983, reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992); and Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (1988, reprint, New York: Avon Books, 1990). For a celebratory but often insightful account of a formative moment in beat history, see Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. For an assessment of the beats and popular fiction, see Thomas Newhouse, *The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States, 1945-1970* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000). One of the best studies of both the lives and literature of the beats is one of the first–see Cook, *The Beat Generation*; but see also the excellent overview of Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (1995, reprint, New York: Pantheon, 1998). One of the few studies written by an historian is also rare in moving beyond New York and San Francisco–see John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Maynard persuasively argues that Venice writers were an important part of the beat literary avant-garde, but he focuses on a small group of people and largely ignores the broader counterculture those writers helped create.

Histories of American radicalism in the 1960s almost always cite beat icons like Kerouac and Ginsberg as progenitors of later upheavals. Representative examples

to a diametrical opposition of "genuine" artists and writers on the one hand versus mass-media stereotypes of beatnik posers on the other, neither of which explains the broader components of countercultures in these years.[14] In contrast, Michael Denning offers a useful distinction between commitment and affiliation that clarifies the development of cultural radicalism. Expanding the parameters of Popular Front culture in the 1930s and 1940s, Denning distinguishes between the relatively small number of intellectuals and activists who converted to ideological programs such as Marxism or became card-carrying members of the Communist Party, and the far larger number of independent leftists and New Deal Democrats who affiliated with various liberal or radical causes but

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include Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 281-287; Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35-36; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147-151; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32-33; and Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987, reprint, New York: Bantam, 1993), 45-54. The best examination of how the beats prefigured the political and cultural radicalism of the 1960s is Paul S. George and Jerold M. Starr, "Beat Politics: New Left and Hippie Beginnings in the Postwar Counterculture," in Starr, ed., *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 189-234.

[14]The literary critic Warren French is most adamant in this regard, insisting with haughty disdain that "the beatniks were the worst thing that ever happened to the beats" and that "a distinction needs to be made" between beatniks and "the work of those 'serious and ambitious' artists who were championed by genuinely concerned avant garde" intellectuals; see *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, 1955-1960* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), xix-xx. Similarly, the historian William L. O'Neill praises beats like Ginsberg and Kerouac as "true cultural subversives" who were "deeply committed" to both literary creativity and individual growth, but categorically rebukes beatniks, who "strove to be 'cool' and 'hip' in the approved manner;" see *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 242-243.

never formally joined left-wing political organizations.[15] A similar framework can be applied to the various subgroups within bohemian countercultures: while some individuals identified as artists or writers and committed themselves to pursuing artistic and literary creativity, many others affiliated with bohemia by frequenting bars and coffeehouses in which avant-garde intellectuals congregated. Bohemianism in the late 1950s and early 1960s should not be conflated with intellectual coteries or mass-media distortions: beat writers were just one component of a much broader counterculture that resonated far more meaningfully than momentary fascination with the latest fad. Although districts such as North Beach and Venice attracted both "serious" artists and sight-seeing tourists, the overwhelming majority of individuals who found bohemianism appealing were somewhere in between these two extremes: having no desire to write the Great American Novel, they nonetheless felt a strong affinity for the alternative attitudes and personal freedom that flourished in metropolitan enclaves where avant-garde intellectuals congregated. Understanding post-World War II bohemianism requires taking this latter group seriously as historical agents whose attraction to oppositional attitudes and ways of life was significant.

In assessing the meaning of bohemians and other social subgroups who deviate from pervasive norms and practices, sociologists draw a fundamental distinction between subcultures, which "differ in some significant way from the dominant culture," and

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[15]Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 61-62.

countercultures, which not only differ but "are also consciously in opposition to the widely accepted norms and values of the dominant culture."[16] However, the line between difference and opposition was often nebulous in North Beach and Venice, as behavior that seemed merely different to some people appeared dangerously oppositional to others.

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[16]Carl L. Bankston III, consulting ed., *Sociology Basics* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 515. One of the first uses of the term "counter culture" was by Theodore Roszak, "Youth and the Great Refusal," *The Nation*, 25 March 1968 (cited in Marwick, *The Sixties*, 11), and a year later Roszak defined the term to mean a "cultural constellation" that comprised "the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs, and communitarian experiments;" see *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), xii. However, the concept of "contraculture" was first proposed by sociologist J. Milton Yinger to denote any instance in which "the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society;" see "Contraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review* 25 (October 1960), 629.

Recent scholarship on the beats has begun to examine the relationship between individual intellectuals and the bohemian milieux in which they lived and worked, but these studies continue to interpret the beats through the prism of avant-garde literature. For example, sociologist Mel van Elteren usefully argues that the beat generation can be studied as a subculture with its own "enclaves and scenes," but his analysis of the "sociological characteristics" of the beats prioritizes "cultural practices which had to do with art," particularly poetry and fiction. Van Elteren focuses on a small group of iconic figures like Ginsberg and Kerouac and fails to examine the beats from the perspective of people who were not artists, writers, or academics. See van Elteren, "The Culture of the Subterraneans: A Sociological View of the Beats," in Van Minnen, Cornelius A., Jaap van der Bent, and Mel van Elteren, eds, *Beat Culture: the 1950s and Beyond* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999), 64, 83.

In his analysis of youth rebellions that emerged in Britain beginning in the mid 1960s, Dick Hebdige defines subculture as "the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups" (ranging from punks to teddy boys) "who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons;" see *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979, reprint, London: Routledge, 1996), 2. Hebdige provides an excellent conceptual framework for the present study, which assesses a cultural phenomenon that was alternately viewed as threatening and harmless and had as one of its key rituals a tendency for members to congregate in the bars and coffeehouses of certain urban districts.

For example, many bohemians believed that racial intermixing among whites and African Americans in the public spaces of North Beach and Venice marked these areas as different, but they did not necessarily think that such activity constituted a challenge to racial segregation in society at large. Yet racial intermixing alarmed police and municipal authorities, who regarded it as a very real threat to racial segregation, one of the most bitterly contested social norms of the postwar decades. Rather than resorting to the polarities of difference and opposition, it is more useful to examine how bohemian communities in North Beach and Venice functioned within broader metropolitan contexts, focusing on the ways in which multiple groups understood the unconventional attitudes and ways of life that were clearly visible in certain parts of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

One of the central characteristics of bohemianism is the fluidity between "bohemian" and "bourgeois," between "counterculture" and "mainstream" or "dominant" culture. The film scholar David Sterritt argues that beatnik coffeehouses were "sites of liminal activity–places not comfortably inside or altogether outside ordinary society, but somewhere on the behavioral and ideological margin, where acts discouraged as eccentric, radical, or simply weird in 'normal' circumstances would be harbored and protected."[17] This insight applies not only to coffeehouses but to postwar bohemianism

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[17]Sterritt, *Mad to Be Saved: The Beats, the '50s, and Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 143. Similarly, Michael Davidson argues that beat writers neither rejected nor supported pervasive values and assumptions but rather sought to work within them to create an immanent critique of Cold War America; see "From Margin to Mainstream: Postwar Poetry and the Politics of Containment," *American*

itself, which was quintessentially liminal, neither "comfortably inside or altogether outside" the broader society. As Christine Stansell succinctly argues, bohemians "always existed in symbiotic relation to bourgeois culture rather than in opposition to it."[18] Furthermore, Jerrold Seigel usefully observes that "There is no action or gesture capable of being identified as Bohemian that cannot also be–or has not been–undertaken outside of Bohemia," yet "This uncertainty was essential, fitting Bohemia for its task of testing and probing the boundaries of bourgeois life, neither accepting them as already given, nor seeking to abolish them."[19] Odd clothing, long-haired men and short-haired women, sexual freedom, the lack of a stable residence and irregular employment were all "Bohemian or not according to how they were meant or how they were taken."[20] While many people felt ambivalent regarding pressures to conform for professional advancement or consume the appropriate commodities to maintain prestige, individuals "were or were not Bohemian to the degree that parts of their lives dramatized these tensions and conflicts for themselves and others, making them visible, and demanding that they be faced."[21] Bohemianism, whether in Paris in the 1850s or in San Francisco a century later, was always about "testing and probing the boundaries" of social norms,

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Literary History 10 (Summer 1998): 266-290.

[18]Stansell, *American Moderns*, 18.

[19]Seigle, *Bohemian Paris*, 12.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., 11.

whether it be bourgeois identity in its formative moment in France or race relations amidst a resurgent civil rights movement in postwar America. Moreover, however nebulous the term "bohemian" was, "bohemia" itself was firmly rooted in particular urban districts and specific public spaces that intellectuals, weekend visitors and out-of-town tourists all agreed were unique environments. Certainly, the precise parameters of what Stansell calls the "bohemian geography of the imagination" often shifted.[22] As certain districts became more popular, new businesses catered to more affluent visitors, rents rose, and avant-garde intellectuals sought out cheaper places to live, beginning anew the process in which countercultural enclaves formed. Nonetheless, individuals who identified as or felt an affinity with bohemians almost always believed that certain metropolitan districts catalyzed personal freedom, self-awareness, meaningful intellectual exchange, and innovation in all areas of life. For such people, "bohemia" often meant cafes, bars and coffeehouses in which individuals debated new ideas and crafted alternative ways of life to a degree that seemed unparalleled elsewhere. The fact that bohemia was simultaneously an open-ended construct yet very specifically tied to particular urban locales meant that a broad range of individuals were drawn to metropolitan areas that seemed to validate adversarial ideas and behavior.

This framework provides a useful way of conceptualizing bohemian countercultures in Los Angeles and San Francisco during the late 1950s and early 1960s. "Countercultures" were social subgroups whose values and ways of life deviated

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[22]Stansell, *American Moderns*, 6.

substantially from pervasive norms and practices and were often regarded by both the members of such subgroups and outsiders as not merely different choices but oppositional threats. "Bohemians" were individuals who did not necessarily identify as poets or painters yet felt an affinity for the alternative beliefs and ways of life of avant-garde intellectuals, and who resided in or frequented urban districts where artists and writers congregated. Thus, "bohemian countercultures" were urban phenomena in which the adversarial ideas articulated by avant-garde intellectuals resonated with a wide array of people who believed that certain metropolitan districts legitimized alternative ways of thinking and living.

Bohemians in Los Angeles and San Francisco crafted a cultural politics that centered on the rejection of consumerism and middle-class affluence, the valorization of racial intermixing and homosexuality, and the reconfiguration of restrictive gender roles. All components of this politics were partial, highly contested and contradictory. Although bohemians often renounced high-paying jobs in favor of personally rewarding work, many who did so came from educationally and economically privileged middle-class backgrounds and could attain financial security if they chose different ways of life. The extent to which postwar bohemians simultaneously rejected and exploited middle-class affluence was readily apparent inside the bars and coffeehouses where they congregated. As sites of commodity consumption, many such places offered an array of coffee, beer, wine and food to customers who, on one level, merely channeled their dissatisfaction with suburbia and white-collar professionalism into new forms of

consumption, leading to what Thomas Frank calls "hip consumerism," the process in which the alienation engendered by capitalist culture leads to new forms of consumption that alleviate individual alienation yet reinforce the dominance of consumerism itself.[23] Such criticism is entirely accurate in identifying yet another instance in which the co-optive mechanisms of capitalism simultaneously create, exploit and neutralize oppositional tendencies. However, this fails to illuminate the extent to which commodification was not the only process at work here. Public spaces in bohemian enclaves functioned in ways that went beyond, and were often antithetical to, consumerism. Patrons of bars and coffeehouses not only consumed commodities, they also shared ideas, debated each other fiercely, and applauded when poets, folk singers and "sick" comedians such as Lenny Bruce critiqued virtually every aspect of contemporary society. In doing so, they developed a sense of community with people who shared their adversarial assumptions.

Similar contradictions existed regarding homosexuality and gender relations among bohemians. While many straight bohemians accepted the presence of homosexuals, they often failed to appreciate the extent to which their gay and lesbian counterparts confronted homophobia in the broader society. Catharine R. Stimpson argues that beat writers like Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs asserted the liberation of male homosexuals but replicated restrictive patterns of masculinity and femininity and

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[23] See Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

ignored the needs of women, whether straight or lesbian. [24] While Stimpson persuasively documents the subordination of women by some male beat writers, she underestimates the extent to which any public assertion of homosexuality, in the hyper-homophobic context of the 1950s, constituted an important challenge to conventional masculinity. She also confines her analysis largely to the holy trinity of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, ignoring important homosexual poets in California like Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, and saying nothing about the broader counterculture in which such intellectuals lived and worked. Furthermore, if some bohemian women enjoyed the opportunity to move beyond roles as housewives by working outside the home, others discovered that men regarded them as meal tickets and sex objects. Alix Kates Schulman emphasizes the sexism that women in the beat generation confronted and argues that the beat rebellion reinforced conventional norms that relegated women to roles as child rearers and housekeepers.[25] While Schulman is correct to highlight the sexism that permeated the beat milieu, her focus on a handful of women who published memoirs, and her very selective reading thereof, obscures the extent to which many bohemian women carved out positions of

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[24]See Stimpson, "The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation," *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 373-392.

[25]See Schulman, "Women Writers of the Beat Generation," *Moody Street Irregulars* 28 (Fall 1994): 3-9. Barbara Ehrenreich argues that beats like Kerouac and Neal Cassady (on whom Kerouac based many of his protagonists) rebelled against both the deadening world of white collar employment as well as marriage and suburban family life, yet she also highlights a crucial class component to the beat rebellion, in which writers like Kerouac celebrated hobos and migrant workers at a time when many intellectuals assumed that class differences, if they existed at all, were insignificant. See Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1983), 52-67.

autonomy and often participated in avant-garde intellectual life as equals.

Race relations among bohemians were similarly contradictory. Although some whites resided in or frequented bohemian enclaves in San Francisco and L.A. because they believed that such areas were racially integrated, African Americans recognized that they were a numerically small component of bohemian countercultures.[26] Jon Panish argues that whites owned nearly all of the music venues, coffeehouses, newspapers, and magazines in postwar Greenwich Village and concludes that "African Americans' participation in these institutions depended, as it did elsewhere in the United States, on the goodwill of white people." Panish also asserts that white intellectuals appropriated black culture as a means to distinguish themselves from the rest of society, but failed to

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[26]The scholarship on white fascination with and appropriation of African American culture is voluminous, but see especially Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); George Lipsitz, "White Desire: Remembering Robert Johnson," in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Greg Tate, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).

Virtually all studies of racial intermixing among bohemians focus on white appropriations of black culture, particularly jazz music. W. T. Lhamon, Jr. argues that during the 1950s, both white and black writers and performers, from Kerouac and Norman Mailer to James Baldwin and Chuck Berry, created what Flannery O'Conner called the "Artificial Nigger,"a Sambo metaphor or artifice into which individuals invested their own needs or desires and became whatever their audiences wanted them to be. For Lhamon, all cultural intermixing among blacks and whites had this Sambo quality of intersecting appropriations. See *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 39-40, 72. Lhamon is unique in identifying similarities in how whites and blacks appropriated African American culture.

appreciate jazz "as a specifically African American expressive form."[27] While Panish is correct to highlight the racism inherent in many white appropriations of black culture, he fails to examine sufficiently why African American culture and jazz music resonated so sharply for white bohemians, nor does he consider the extent to which white interest in black culture undermined as well as perpetuated racism. Furthermore, Panish focuses on how a handful of white intellectuals, many of them beat writers, appropriated black jazz performance, yet scholars need to assess other components of countercultural race relations, including how whites and blacks understood racial intermixing inside the public spaces of bohemian enclaves and how more conservative and racist segments of society viewed such intermingling. The sociologist Wini Breines provides a useful framework for understanding whites' interest in African American culture. Breines argues that white middle-class teenage women expressed their dissatisfaction with conventional gender roles through an affinity for African American culture, including jazz music, as well as social groups and cultural forms that were coded "black" or off-limits by many whites,

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[27]See Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 27, 40. Eric Lott argues that American bohemianism originated in black face minstrel performance, in which white men appropriated African American blackness as a counterpoint to mid-nineteenth century bourgeois norms. For Lott, white appropriation of African American blackness is the essence of American bohemianism, and while he admits that such appropriation "may or may not have racist results," he dismisses Walt Whitman and Jack Kerouac as "the minor disasters bohemia has perpetrated" and emphasizes that American bohemianism is essentially "class abdication through gendered cross-racial immersion." See Lott, *Love and Theft*, 50-55. While Lott provides suggestive insights into the role of race in the early years of American bohemianism, his discussion is too brief to establish persuasively that racial appropriation forms the core of bohemia. Nor does he assess at sufficient length the relationship between minstrelsy and bohemianism in the nineteenth century.

such as ethnic, working-class young men, rock and roll music, and the beats. While these women were often ignorant of African American life, they simultaneously felt a genuine affinity for black culture and challenged racial segregation in their exploration of the cultures of other racial and ethnic groups. In short, Breines persuasively argues that the attraction of white teenage women to black culture simultaneously reinforced and undermined racism, as such women consciously abandoned white suburbs to explore other components of postwar society.[28] Breines recalls that as a teenager, she was simultaneously a cheerleader, an enthusiastic consumer of cosmetics, and a weekend visitor to Greenwich Village.[29] White teenage women like Breines used bohemia to explore alternative understandings of race relations and gender identity, an exploration which many parents hoped to prevent. By examining the dissatisfaction with white middle-class norms that motivated white teenage women's interest in black culture, Breines helps illuminate why such attraction was so pervasive and how it was enacted.

Thus, middle-class privilege, homophobia, the subordination of women, and racism among California bohemians co-existed with the voluntary renunciation of affluence, the legitimation of homosexuality, the acceptance of women as intellectual equals, and racial intermixing. In short, bohemian countercultures simultaneously replicated and challenged many repressive features of postwar society. While the extent

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[28]See Breines, "Postwar White Girls' Dark Others," in Joel Foreman, ed., *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury Icons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 65-66, 70-72.

[29]See Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 165-166.

to which urban districts like North Beach and Venice catalyzed unconventional behavior and individual freedom was problematic and contradictory, it was also very real and meaningful for many people.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, American bohemianism underwent a geographical reorientation from east to west.[30] If Greenwich Village epitomized

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[30]In the most ambitious attempt to assert the cultural significance of California to date, Stephen Schwartz argues that the state developed a unique cultural identity that was inherently radical and then exported this radicalism to the rest of the nation. This radicalism was based not on ideology but rather on experience and new ways of living and thinking. For Schwartz, this cultural influence began at the outset of Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century and continued through the mid-twentieth century. See *From West to East: California and the Making of the American Mind* (New York: Free Press, 1998). One problem with this book is that Schwartz focuses more on asserting the cultural influence of California than on demonstrating it through sufficient examples. While he provides a useful analysis of both the intellectual and cultural history and the leftist political radicalism of the state, he does not persuasively demonstrate the influence of these forces outside of California. Moreover, he discusses the 1960s only in a brief epilogue, yet it was precisely this decade that began the most potent phase in California's cultural influence, from the rise of the Haight-Ashbury as the American hippie mecca to the influence of music, including the Beach Boys, the Doors and later the "acid" rock of the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and others, as well as the rise of Ronald Reagan and the growing rejection of liberalism among white suburbanites.

An insightful study of California's influence on postwar popular culture is Kirse Granat May, *Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture, 1955-1966* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). May argues that California was a focal point of popular culture depictions of suburban youth, including positive imagery centered around Disneyland, movies like *Gidget* and the music of the Beach Boys as well as more negative portrayals of young people in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the Watts race riot. May briefly discusses magazine coverage of the beats, emphasizing that the media mocked beatniks as lazy and arguing that writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg were too old to connect with California baby boomers (140-142). This latter point is highly debatable–although May stops her study in 1966, the Human Be-In at Golden Gate Park the following year featured poetry and Buddhist chants by beat icons Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, demonstrating that some older bohemians served as models of cultural rebellion for hippies (Timothy Leary was perhaps the archetypal example of this phenomenon). On the Be-In, see Perry, *Haight-Ashbury*, 124-

bohemianism in the first half of the twentieth century, no urban enclave resonated as a hippie mecca more than the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. This geographical reorientation began in the late 1950s, when the mass media promoted North Beach as the national headquarters of the beat generation and advertised Venice as the newest bohemia in America. Another cause was the increasing mobility of Americans after World War II, as federal and state transportation programs created a national network of highways that facilitated travel from coast to coast, while economic prosperity made automobiles more available than ever before.[31] By the late 1950s, bohemian byways no longer led exclusively to Greenwich Village, as many Americans went "on the road" in search of new experiences, people and places. Obviously, the Village was still the largest bohemian enclave in America and drew many of the most talented writers, artists and musicians, but it was no longer the only bohemia of national significance, as urban districts in California now resonated powerfully for many people who felt an attraction to countercultural life. In short, although New York certainly remained the dominant artistic and literary center of the nation, Greenwich Village ceased to be either the real or symbolic capital of American bohemianism.

Postwar bohemians differed substantially from counterparts who came before and after them. Greenwich Villagers in the mid 1910s inhabited a national political climate in which the "Progressive" faith in harnessing government to improve society cut across

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[31]William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II* (fourth ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119.

party lines, while potent radical movements such as the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World achieved substantial support for more fundamental change.[32] Similarly, the hippie counterculture often overlapped with the community-based activism of the New Left and the movement to end the Vietnam War.[33] Furthermore, Villagers in the 1910s enjoyed the economic opportunities available to talented writers, illustrators and journalists in New York City, the center of publishing in the U.S.[34] Likewise, many hippies knew only the economics of affluence, and assumed that the stifling careers and suburban ranch homes that their parents valued so highly would always be available– indeed, the apparent permanence of middle-class prosperity impelled many baby boomers to seek hippie alternatives.[35] In contrast, bohemians in the Eisenhower and Kennedy years confronted different historical contexts that spawned a unique set of assumptions. The formative events for Americans born from the mid 1920s to the early 1930s, the key cohort in this study, were the twin crises of the Great Depression and World War II,

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[32]The best history of the Wobblies remains Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (1969, reprint, New York: Quadrangle, 1974). On the history of American socialism, see David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (1955, reprint, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967); and Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement: 1897-1912* (1952, reprint, London: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

[33]On the intersection of New Left politics and hippie cultural rebellion, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 247-295.

[34]Stansell, *American Moderns*, 152-157.

[35]On the "post-scarcity" context within which many hippies understood the world, see Andrew Kirk, "'Machines of Loving Grace:' Alternative Technology, Environment, and the Counterculture," in Braunstein and Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation*, 354-355.

followed by the dual horrors of the atomic bomb and the Holocaust. Then came the collapse of the Popular Front and left-wing political activism, the rise of McCarthyite anti-Communist repression, and the stalemate in Korea. Finally, Americans in the 1950s witnessed the ascendance of a culture and economy of commodity consumption and military production that promised individual fulfillment and collective security yet seemed to spawn as much alienation as contentment.[36] All of this meant that postwar bohemians were less credulous than either the Villagers or the hippies about the ability of inspired people to achieve social change, more aware of both the internal divisiveness and external repression that could decimate radical politics, and far more concerned with attaining individual fulfillment and psychological coherence in a world that seemed simultaneously horrific and absurd.

Yet the proverbial conservatism and conformity of the 1950s co-existed with countervailing tendencies that, by the middle of the decade, constituted an important shift in the political and cultural climates of the nation.[37] The public disgrace of McCarthy

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[36]On the most influential critiques of postwar conformity, see Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (1985, reprint, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), chap. 4. The attempt of white middle-class Americans to use suburban homes as zones of containment against outside threats, from nuclear annihilation to mundane professional pressures, is explored by Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), chaps. 4-8. On the devastating effects of McCarhyite witch hunts, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998); and David K. Johnson, *Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[37]In the last ten to fifteen years, scholars have increasingly challenged interpretations of the 1950s as an era of conformity. See especially Foreman, ed., *The*

during nationally televised investigations of Communist subversion in the Army revealed the excesses of opportunistic red baiting and anti-Communist hysteria.[38] Furthermore, the launch of the *Sputnik* satellite by the Soviet Union led immediately to fears that the U.S. was losing the Cold War, but the resulting emphasis on science, technology and education as indices of national power seemed a welcome change from foreign policy pronouncements regarding "massive retaliation" and "brinksmanship."[39] Editorial headlines in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the weeks after Sputnik proclaimed "Secrecy-Security Mania Subsiding" and an "End of the Era of Overanxiety," as the paper approvingly noted the growing importance of scientific and technological advances rather

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Other Fifties; Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*; Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[38]Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, chap. 9; see also Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2003), 477, 484-485, 504-505.

[39]On the role of *Sputnik* in raising concerns about American technological strength, see David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 624-626, 700. On the setbacks the satellite posed in America's propaganda war with the Soviets, see Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Cultures, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 123.

than spies and counterintelligence in the conflict with the Soviet Union.[40] Moreover, the reinvigoration of the African American civil rights movement in the wake of the *Brown* decision and the Emmet Till murder belied claims about the complacency of Americans during the Eisenhower years.[41] As a woman who publicly protested to allow left-wing activists to speak on the Berkeley campus in the mid 1950s recalled, "everybody thinks everybody was silent in the Fifties, but that's bullshit."[42] The changing tenor of the times was even more apparent in the popular culture. The threat of juvenile delinquency competed with Communist infiltration as the dominant paranoia of the 1950s, as many parents, clergy, educators and politicians feared that they could no longer instill traditional values in rebellious adolescents.[43] Such concerns were not entirely without merit, as the popularity of actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean, along with the explosion of interest in rock music and Elvis Presley, signaled a growing receptivity among young people to cultural rebels who challenged authority figures and disregarded or openly ridiculed conventional codes of behavior, particularly the imperative to "settle down" via marriage, a steady job and a home in the suburbs. As one baby boomer

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[40]*San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 November 1957, 24; *This World* (Sunday magazine supplement), 29 December 1957, 2.

[41]On the role of the *Brown* decision and the Till murder in galvanizing African American activism, see Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (revised ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 43-44.

[42]Mildred Dickemann, "Coming to Cal, 1950," oral history transcript, interviewed by William Benemann, 1996, University of California at Berkeley, p. 22.

[43]James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

recalled, "after you saw something like *Rebel Without a Cause*, you felt like going out and breaking a few windshields" in the spirit of "a brooding nobody with something silent inside just seething to get out."[44]

In sum, by 1957, the year of the *Howl* controversy and the publication of *On the Road*, many Americans appreciated the adversarial culture of bohemians to an extent that was not possible just a few years earlier. In 1952, the novel *Go* by John Clellon Holmes was published, the first book to reference a "beat generation," and his essay "This Is the Beat Generation" appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* shortly thereafter.[45] A friend of Kerouac, Holmes announced the arrival of a new generation artists, writers and rebels who rejected the politics of the Cold War and the culture of commodity consumption. Despite the substantial exposure that a feature article in the leading newspaper of the nation provided, there was no immediate growth of public interest in bohemianism generally or the beats in particular, and *Go* sold only a few thousand copies.[46] Five years later, with the Cold War apparently undergoing a thaw, a wave of civil rights activism sweeping the south, and the growing popularity of male actors and singers who openly defied conventional norms and authority figures, the alternative attitudes that the beats both articulated and embodied would resonate sharply in America.

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[44]Tim Findley, "Tom Hayden: Rolling Stone Interview Part 1," *Rolling Stone*, 26 October 1972, 37.

[45]*Go* (New York: Scribner's, 1952); "This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times Magazine*, 16 November 1952.

[46]Holmes, "Introduction," *Go* (reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1988), xx.

Politics and Culture in Los Angeles and San Francisco

The economic growth that characterized the postwar years had especially strong effects in California. Military production during World War II stimulated the expansion of shipbuilding in key ports, including San Francisco and Oakland in the Bay Area and Los Angeles in the southland, bringing millions of migrants to the state in the early 1940s.[47] This growth continued during the postwar years, as the Bay Area remained a major West Coast center of shipping while the aerospace industry bolstered the economy of L.A.[48] The mild climate and economic opportunity available in the Bay Area and southern California ensured that these regions remained a magnet for new residents throughout the postwar decades.

Although Los Angeles and San Francisco both experienced rapid economic expansion and population growth in the mid-twentieth century, they had very different political and cultural climates that derived from variations in their historical development. Beginning in 1849, the discovery of gold near present-day Sacramento lured tens of thousands of people from the eastern U.S., Europe, Australia and Asia to San Francisco, making it an ethnically diverse "instant city" that in the span of 25 years achieved population levels that cities like Boston and New York required centuries to attain.[49] As

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[47]Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 223.

[48]Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183-194.

[49]Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 135.

the center of shipping and finance on the West Coast, San Francisco continued to grow rapidly throughout the later nineteenth century, and the accelerated economic expansion that the city experienced made many local employers hesitant to risk business opportunities with protracted labor disputes.[50] Moreover, many of the migrants who arrived in the later nineteenth century were skilled laborers from European countries with traditions of working-class consciousness and cooperation.[51] Thus a politically potent labor movement developed in San Francisco that made the Democratic Party a powerful force in local politics.[52] Furthermore, the gold rush of the mid-nineteenth century, the expanding shipping industry of later decades, and the role of the city as a major point of debarkation for soldiers fighting in the Pacific theater during World War II meant that substantial numbers of single young men inhabited San Francisco for over a century. Such people often sought alcohol, gambling and prostitution as entertainment, making taverns and brothels staple attractions in the red-light districts that sprang up in the central part of the city.[53] Some political leaders and many police officers depended on such businesses for graft and bribes, and periodic anti-vice campaigns usually lacked broad political support, giving the city a reputation as a "wide-open town" that was remarkably tolerant of disreputable diversions (in 1921, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors

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[50]William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 24, 81.

[51]Ibid., 55-6, 80-1, 207-210.

[52]Ibid., 20, 80-100.

[53]Ibid., 71, 75, 192.

censured two police officers for attempting to enforce federal Prohibition laws).[54]

In contrast, Los Angeles attracted different migrants who contributed to the far more conservative environment of southern California. L.A. remained a provincial outpost until the late nineteenth century, when newspaper owners, real estate developers and local political leaders used their control of huge tracts of land and the attendant water rights to promote southern California as a haven for white, middle-class mid-westerners seeking affordable homes and restorative sunshine. Neither these bourgeois newcomers nor the rural migrants who followed in the 1930s had substantial sympathy for labor unions or Democrats, often associating both with left-wing subversion.[55] If San Francisco was called a "wide-open town," civic boosters promoted L.A. as "the ideal Protestant city," a bastion of Anglo-Saxon purity and white middle-class respectability that, based on censuses from 1920 to 1960, had a higher proportion of native-born white Protestants than any major city in the U.S.[56] Despite the fact that by 1930, Los Angles not only contained the largest Mexican American community in the nation but was also the home of tens of thousands of Jewish, Japanese and African Americans, conservative white

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[54]Ibid., 71, 75, 107-9; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

[55]Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990, reprint, New York: Vintage, 1992), 114; Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (1967, reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 131.

[56]Davis, *City of Quartz*, 325-326.

Protestants wielded tremendous influence in the city both culturally and politically.[57] In such a climate, Prohibition was enforced rigorously while Aimee Semple McPherson preached the "foursquare Gospel" to thousands of Angelenos in her million-dollar Angelus Temple and reached tens of thousands more via her own radio station.[58] Thus a conservative political and cultural climate developed in southern California that precluded a strong labor movement and bolstered support for Republican Party politics and moral reform initiatives.

Furthermore, Los Angeles and San Francisco had vastly different urban geographies. San Franciscans began running out of space in the 1850s, when coves on the northeastern edge of the peninsula were filled-in with rock and soil to increase the amount of land available to merchants and shippers who ferried men and supplies to mainland gold mines.[59] Rapid growth in later decades led to a centralized and vertical metropolis, with a downtown financial hub, nearby entertainment districts and residential neighborhoods all in relatively close proximity. In contrast, the super-abundance of land in southern California and the shrewd marketing thereof to affluent migrants, who could forgo crowded inner-city tenements for houses of their own, made Los Angeles County one of the most decentralized and horizontal metropolises in America, what Mike Davis

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[57]Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 120, 144, 146-8.

[58]Ibid., 170, 141.

[59]Oscar Lewis, *San Francisco: Mission to Metropolis* (second ed., San Diego: Howell-North Books, 1980), 83-86.

calls an "urban galaxy" in which residential neighborhoods, business districts and independent municipalities radiate outward to form the "spiral-arms of the L.A. megalopolis."[60] By 1930, L.A. had more single-family and fewer multi-family dwellings than any large American city, with nearly ninety-four percent of residents living in their own houses.[61] Connected only by a labyrinthine network of freeways, the urban core of Los Angeles and its sprawling suburban peripheries failed to cohere into a single, concentrated metropolitan milieu that characterized cities such as San Francisco, Chicago or New York.[62]

Finally, Los Angeles and San Francisco had diametrically opposed intellectual and cultural legacies. The Bohemian Club of San Francisco was founded in the 1870s as a breakfast fellowship for journalists interested in the arts, and in later decades it evolved into an exclusive upper-class coterie of lawyers, businessmen, politicians and the writers and artists they patronized.[63] Furthermore, San Francisco was known since the nineteenth century as a city with a vibrant avant-garde milieu that included literary luminaries such

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[60]Davis, *City of Quartz*, 6, 305.

[61]Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 145-146. Fogelson notes that Philadelphia had more two family dwellings but fewer dwellings that contained three or more families.

[62]Ibid., 141-145.

[63]Don Herron, *The Literary World of San Francisco and Its Environs* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1985), 46-47; Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Nancy J. Peters, *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), x.

as Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris and Jack London.[64] Moreover, beginning in the 1930s, the Bay Area hosted a vibrant literary scene that eventually included writers such as Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Kenneth Patchen, Philip Lamantia, Robin Blaser and Madeline Gleason, as well as academics sympathetic to avant-garde literature like Josephine Miles at Berkeley and Ruth Witt-Diamont (who founded the Poetry Center at San Francisco State College in 1954), and KPFA, the first listener-financed radio station in the United States, which broadcast poetry readings and publicized local artistic and literary events.[65] Finally, at the Ferus Gallery in October 1955, Allen Ginsberg gave the first public reading of "Howl," igniting a ferment in avant-

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[64]Herron, *Literary World of San Francisco*, 10; Ferlinghetti and Peters, *Literary San Francisco*, x, 64, 86, 99.

[65]The best studies of the intellectual ferment in the Bay Area at mid-century are French, *San Francisco Poetry Renaissance*; Ferlinghetti and Peters, *Literary San Francisco*, 153-195; and Michael E. Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For an excellent history of avant-garde intellectual life in both the Bay Area and Los Angeles after World War II, see Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Candida Smith argues that the concern of avant-garde intellectuals with personal freedom and individual experience resonated sharply with the hippie counterculture and the liberation movements of women and homosexuals. He asserts that the issue of obscenity and pornography in art and literature during the mid 1960s represented a more basic concern with individual freedom versus social control, and that hippies, women and homosexuals in liberation movements, and anti-Vietnam War activists all confronted this concern with the individual and society. Yet Candida Smith too often asserts this broader resonance without arguing it at sufficient length or providing specific examples, and most of his concrete instances of the impact of avant-garde intellectuals focus on negative reactions to obscenity and pornography by conservatives. He focuses far more on analyzing the careers and creative output of individual artists and writers than on demonstrating their broader social and cultural impact.

garde literary circles and signaling the arrival of a new voice in American poetry.[66] Two years later, when City Lights Books was cleared of obscenity charges for selling *Howl and Other Poems*, San Francisco cemented its national reputation as a city that both stimulated and appreciated artistic and literary creativity.[67] All of this contributed to what many writers, critics and journalists called the "San Francisco Renaissance." In contrast, Los Angeles assumed a very different intellectual mantle. The city emerged as an influential force in American culture during the 1910s, when East Coast film producers moved their operations to southern California to exploit low labor costs, varied landscapes for filming and plentiful sunshine for lighting.[68] By the early 1920s, Hollywood was the center of the American film industry, and henceforth perceptions of the cultural significance of L.A. were inextricably tied to the movie business and often failed to distinguish between the fantasy, glamor and commercialism invoked by "Hollywood" and the multifaceted realities of Los Angeles.[69] One European emigre intellectual, appalled at the "fake European elegance" of the Hollywood district, concluded that despite the writers, artists and aspiring actors who populated Los Angeles, "the sensibility of a real Montmartre, Soho, or even Greenwich Village, cannot be felt" in

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[66]The best accounts of the celebrated Six Gallery reading are in Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*, 214-216; and Raskin, *American Scream*, 6-9.

[67]A useful account of the oft-told *Howl* obscenity case is in Raskin, *American Scream*, 210-223.

[68]Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (New York: Scribner's, 1990), 99-104.

[69]Davis, *City of Quartz*, 18, 47.

an environment that "lacks the patina of age."[70] Without the intellectual tradition, the cultural refinement or the vibrant metropolitan milieu of major cities in the eastern U.S. and western Europe, L.A. struck many intellectuals as a cultural wasteland dominated by transplanted Babbitts and Okies on the one hand and ruthless movie executives on the other, all of whom seemed deplorably content to remain philistines.

Despite these vastly divergent metropolitan contexts, North Beach and Venice shared key traits as entertainment districts. At the turn of the century, North Beach was a predominantly Italian-American neighborhood whose population was two-thirds male and included many laborers and small-business owners.[71] The Barbary Coast area, located along the southern edge of North Beach, was the most notorious red-light district in San Francisco, with an array of taverns, gambling houses and brothels that provided entertainment for the large number of single young men who populated the city.[72] The brothels and gambling establishments were closed in 1917, as many businessmen, reformers and politicians concluded that the mining-camp mentality previously endorsed or at least tolerated by civic leaders was unsuited to the new and improved San Francisco that boosters envisioned after the devastating fire of the previous decade (which destroyed nearly all of downtown).[73] Yet with the repeal of Prohibition, many bars and nightclubs

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[70]Qtd. in ibid., 50.

[71]Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco*, 73-74.

[72]Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (1933, reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, no date), 98-99.

[73]Ibid., 299-300; Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco*, 108.

opened in North Beach in the 1930s and 1940s, some featuring provocative dance shows with cross-dressing male and female impersonators.[74] Such venues helped to catalyze a homosexual culture in the district, centered in bars and clubs whose clientele included both gay men and lesbians.[75] Furthermore, the physical proximity of North Beach to the old Barbary Coast meant that the district attracted both Bay Area residents and out-of-town tourists who hoped to glimpse the salacious remnants of vice and seedy entertainment, newly embodied in the exotic spectacle of cross-dressing performers.[76] Finally, low rents attracted artists and writers who sought affordable housing and could read their poems and display their paintings in area bars and restaurants. Thus by the 1950s, the position of North Beach as the Latin Quarter of San Francisco was well established. Tourist publications often highlighted the "whimsical Bohemian atmosphere" of the district and emphasized that "the Latin Quarter is bohemian. Long have artists had homes and studios" in the area.[77]

Venice made a more grandiose bid to become an entertainment center but ultimately prospered far less from the economics of tourism. In the early twentieth century, local entrepreneur Abbot Kinney promoted Venice as the "Coney Island of the

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[74]Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 49-62.

[75]Ibid.

[76]Ibid.

[77]*Guest Informant: The 1960-61 Mark Hopkins Hotel Edition* (Los Angeles: Pacific Hotel Publications, 1960), n. p.; *Your Guide to San Francisco and Its Nearby Vacationlands* (San Francisco: Californians, Inc., 1957), 6.

West,"constructing canals and Renaissance style store-front facades that mimicked the grandeur of its European namesake, and building a beach-side amusement park that attracted the first generation of Hollywood celebrities and hordes of tourists.[78] Yet the 1920s brought stagnation, as the growing popularity of movies and especially radio provided alternate forms of entertainment, while increasing automobile ownership and an expanding freeway system made it easier for tourists to visit other parts of southern California.[79] Furthermore, disreputable speakeasies of the Prohibition era replaced many fashionable restaurants and bars, and annexation into Los Angeles led to neglect of the local infrastructure.[80] At the end of the 1920s, a wildcat venture struck oil in the district, and Venice quickly became one of the largest petroleum fields in the state.[81] Yet in a few years oil production fell sharply, and petroleum pollution ran into the canals, leading to noxious smells and filthy water.[82] By the 1950s, Venice was a decaying, largely working-class neighborhood populated mainly by native-born whites and Jewish retirees, with a

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[78]Jeffrey Stanton, *Venice California: "Coney Island of the Pacific"* (Los Angeles: Donahue Publishing, 1987), 4-53; Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 80.

[79]Stanton, *Venice California*, 102.

[80]"Venice May Revive Its Canal Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1961, p. 1, 28.

[81]Stanton, *Venice California*, 172, 177.

[82]Ibid.

small proportion of Latinos and African Americans.[83] In 1958, real estate developers who hoped to compete with Disneyland built Pacific Ocean Park at the northern edge of Venice, and although the Park drew tens of thousands of tourists annually, its location near a dilapidated and seedy part of L.A. meant that many potential customers refused to go there because of the drug dealers and petty criminals who roamed the streets at night.[84]

In sum, both Venice and North Beach were perfectly suited locales for the development of bohemian countercultures. As areas with low rents, they attracted artists and writers who needed makeshift spaces in which to live and work but usually had little money. Furthermore, as somewhat seedy entertainment districts that attracted both frequent visitors and occasional tourists, North Beach and Venice had long resonated as places that were out of the ordinary and even vaguely subversive. As such, these enclaves were ideal locations for both avant-garde intellectuals who wanted to push the boundaries of art and literature and individuals who sought alternatives to the monotonous routines of steady employment and suburban tranquility.

Los Angeles and San Francisco together provide an excellent lens through which to examine postwar bohemianism. Analyzing North Beach Venice illuminates the similarities and differences among bohemians in cities with sharply divergent political

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[83]Raymond A. Rocco, "Latino Los Angeles: Reframing Boundaries/Borders," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 367; Amy Hill Shevitz, "Jewish Space and Place in Venice," in Ava F. Kahn and Marc Dollinger, eds., *California Jews* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 69; personal interview with Carol Fondiller, Venice, California, 20 April 2002.

[84]Maynard, *Venice West*, 147; Stanton, *Venice California*, 222.

and cultural histories. The existence of a counterculture in postwar San Francisco was obviously not surprising, given the city's well-established reputation for tolerating disreputable behavior and cultivating literary talent. Yet Los Angeles was an altogether different case, and analyzing the development of countercultures there reveals the extent to which bohemianism resonated outside bastions of avant-garde intellectual life. Moreover, the decades after World War II witnessed the growing economic, political and cultural power of the Sunbelt, and few states were more important in this regard than California, which ironically incubated both the Haight-Ashbury and Ronald Reagan.[85] The rise of North Beach and Venice to national prominence as beat generation meccas was a significant component of the growing cultural influence of California in the postwar decades. Thus the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco provide insight into both the history of bohemianism and broader transformations in postwar American culture.

The Bohemian Countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco

This study focuses on the brief but crucial period of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the adversarial attitudes and behavior of bohemians came to permeate American popular culture, and countercultures in Los Angeles and San Francisco

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[85]On the rise of the sunbelt, see Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (2001, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), chap. 4. On conservatism in southern California as a precursor to national political trends, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

challenged pervasive social norms. Historians of bohemian countercultures in America often utilize narrow chronological periods: many studies of bohemianism in Greenwich Village focus on the 1910s, often 1912 to 1917, while most histories of the Haight-Ashbury focus on the second half of the 1960s.[86] The recurring use of such tightly focused periodizations reflects their utility in studying moments in American history when adversarial assumptions began to move from the periphery to the center of cultural life. Such transformations were often most visible in bohemian enclaves. As one San Franciscan recalled, the "hectic mad time between 1957 and 1962" seemed an era in which "an electrical energy flowed through the streets" of North Beach.[87] Urban districts like North Beach and Venice were by no means the only arenas in which an "electrical energy" was at work in these years, but they offer a useful lens through which to explore such currents.

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[86]Examples include Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*; Humphrey, *Children of Fantasy*; and Marcus, "The Interaction between Political and Cultural Radicalism." Other studies of cultural change that focus on watersheds in the 1910s include Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, eds., *1915, The Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art and the New Theatre in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); and Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Knopf, 1959). Studies of the hippies that focus on the second half of the 1960s include Perry, *Haight-Ashbury*; Miller, *Hippies and American Values*; Hoskyns, *Beneath the Diamond Sky*; Doyle, "Haight-Ashbury Diggers;" and Silos, "'Everybody Get Together."

[87]Jerry Kamstra, "Part Fact, Part Fiction," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 11 May 1975, no sec., n. p., "Kamstra, Jerry--Activist, Etc." envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings Morgue, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library; Jerry Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950-1980* (no place: Peer Amid Press, 1980), chap. 1, p. 17. Pagination for this self-published typescript is incomplete, and thus chapters are cited along with page numbers when available.

Chapter one examines how mass-media depictions of the beat generation portrayed bohemianism. Newspapers, magazines, movies and television programs simultaneously sanitized and exaggerated the oppositional potential of bohemians, presenting beatniks in contradictory extremes of apathetic idlers and nihilistic psychopaths. Yet the mass media also advertised bohemian districts as arenas that legitimized unconventional behavior, including homosexuality and interracial sex. Furthermore, audiences responded to such depictions in ways that the producers of popular culture neither anticipated nor controlled, finding relevance in the adversarial images and ideas associated with the beat generation. In covering the beats, the mass media disseminated alternative attitudes and practices to a large audience and brought bohemian unconventionality into American popular culture.

This publicity led to the rapid expansion of urban districts where writers and artists congregated. Chapter two analyzes the allure of bohemian enclaves, focusing on the extent to which new residents and frequent visitors valued the public spaces of North Beach and Venice as sites that stimulated new ways of thinking and living. This chapter also assesses countercultural entrepreneurship by focusing on the varying motivations and experiences of individuals who established bars and coffeehouses in bohemian enclaves. North Beach and Venice were eclectic environments that included dedicated writers and artists, frequent visitors with little interest in art and literature, shrewd businessmen who exploited popular interest in beatniks, and naive poets who imagined that managing a coffeehouse would be a workable middle ground between bohemian nonconformity and

bourgeois responsibility. Yet most of these people shared core assumptions regarding the excesses of the postwar economy and culture of consumerism and believed that individual fulfillment was more important than the accumulation of status-conferring commodities and suburban respectability.

The alternative attitudes and ways of life that many people found in bohemian enclaves led both to new forms of liberation and old patterns of discrimination for women, homosexuals and African Americans. Chapter three explores the contradictory roles that gender, sexuality and race played in the bohemian districts of Los Angeles and San Francisco, focusing on the ways in which certain urban areas constituted countercultural niches in which restrictive gender roles, homophobia and racial segregation never disappeared but could be circumvented to an extent that was often far more difficult to sustain in other parts of the metropolitan landscape. The ability of minority groups to gain acceptance among bohemians should not be overemphasized: women and African Americans in particular confronted bias and prejudice in the form of male chauvinism and white ignorance of and condescension toward the realities of racism, both in America overall and in bohemian districts especially. However, racism, sexism and homophobia did not pervade bohemian enclaves to the extent that they did many other urban areas, and this enabled women, African Americans and homosexuals to attain partial and contested but nonetheless significant forms of personal freedom.

One form of such freedom was public intermixing among blacks and whites, which caused outrage among racist civic groups, police and city leaders. Chapter four

assesses the ways in which municipal authorities sought to repress the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco and the strategies bohemians developed to fight such oppression. The focal point of these battles were the public spaces in which bohemians congregated, as police and municipal governments harassed the owners and customers of particular businesses. Bohemians responded by allying with groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, securing legal counsel to fight the closure of bars and coffeehouses, forming organizations to pool their resources and holding protests and demonstrations to draw attention to their cause. Although these efforts met with limited success, they demonstrated that the supposedly apolitical bohemians of the postwar years were in fact fully capable of organizing to fight harassment and defend their access to public space.

Ultimately, this study explores how bohemianism resonated in postwar America. Throughout the history of American bohemianism, exactly who or what was bohemian remained nebulous, yet where bohemia existed was much more certain, as intellectuals and the mass media often tied bohemianism to particular locales, especially urban districts where writers, artists, musicians congregated. The fact that "bohemia" has been such an open-ended construct meant that a wide array of people found it alluring and gravitated to places where it thrived. Thus understanding the significance of American bohemianism necessitates examining the metropolitan milieux in which it so often flourished, including the various groups that celebrated, critiqued and at times repressed urban countercultures.

Chapter 1
"Furor and Fascination:"
The Beat Generation, Bohemianism, and Postwar Popular Culture

In 1957, the obscenity controversy surrounding *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg and the instant success of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac precipitated a mass-media sensation over the beat generation and its culture of bohemian artists and writers. Newspapers in large cities, mass-circulation magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Playboy* and *Life*, movies like *High School Confidential*, *Gidget*, *The Beat Generation* and *The Subterraneans*, television programs such as *Route 66*, *77 Sunset Strip* and *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, as well as the writings of beats themselves, brought the unconventional behavior and attitudes of bohemians to a mass audience. By the early 1960s, images of the beat generation pervaded American popular culture. When *The Nation* featured a symposium on "Rebels with a Hundred Causes" in 1961, one contributor noted that since the appearance of *On the Road*, "many hundreds of thousands of words have been written about these new rebels, and the word beatnik has become a part of our language, calling up a picture of a shaggy-bearded type who says 'Like, man.' A public image of the beatnik has been created, so that he is instantly recognizable in *Saturday Evening Post* cartoons, on television, on the streets."[1] Another contributor assessed activism at Berkeley and concluded that "The beats may have helped crystallize for the students a concept of what they are *against*. A list of pet phobias, compiled from conversations with a number of students, have a beat ring," including "Specious ideas,"

[1]Tim A. Ross, "Rise and Fall of the Beats," *Nation*, 27 May 1961, 456.

"sacred cows of American life," "institutions [like the FBI, House Un-American Activities Committee] that represent themselves as above criticism," and "the Madison Avenue mentality."[2] Within just a few years, the beat generation had permeated American popular culture, its influence noted in everything from cartoons to student political activism.

The media sensation over the beat generation disseminated bohemian unconventionality to a mass audience. Of course, the media had popularized bohemianism long before the beats. In late 1910s, mass-circulation magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* satirized Greenwich Village as the haunt of short-haired women and long-haired men who waxed poetic about avant-garde art and left wing politics, while *Vanity Fair* lamented in 1920 that the Village increasingly attracted affluent tourists from the suburbs and the Upper West Side.[3] Individual writers also played an important role in popularizing bohemianism. *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway was not only a classic work of modernist fiction but also a vivid portrayal of the Lost Generation and the expatriate milieu of Europe, while Carl Van Vechten's novel *Nigger Heaven* publicized

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[2]Jessica Mitford Treuhaft, "The Indignant Generation," *Nation*, 27 May 1961, 455. Brackets are Treuhaft's.

[3]On the "private war" between Villagers and the *Post* in the early 1920s, and the growing cultural influence of the Village west of the Hudson, see Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934, reprint of 1951 edition, New York: Penguin, 1994), 53-58-59, 64. On the role of *Vanity Fair* in marketing bohemianism to affluent consumers, see Michael Murphy, "'One Hundred Per Cent Bohemia:' Pop Decadence and the Aestheticization of Commodity in the Rise of the Slicks," in Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt, eds., *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 61-62, 64, 83, 86.

racial intermixing in Harlem and brought droves of white slummers to uptown Manhattan.[4] Similarly, movies publicized Greenwich Village, often utilizing independent female characters who find autonomy and freedom in the district. A small sampling of such films includes *The Girl from Bohemia* (1918), *A Girl in Bohemia* (1919), the documentary *Such Is Life in Greenwich Village* (1919), a remake of *La Boheme* starring Lillian Gish in 1926, *Murder in Greenwich Village* (1937), and *Greenwich Village* (1944), in which Carmen Miranda plays a dancer at a Prohibition-era speakeasy.[5] Indeed, by the 1920s bohemia had become so easily digestible that it was fictionalized as one stage in the mid-life crisis of a businessman in the novel *Babbitt*, in which the protagonist briefly joins a group of urban sophisticates known as "the Bunch," who are not only "wise, beautiful and amusing" but exude a "cynical superiority:" "Don't you love to sit on the floor?" one of them crows, "It's so bohemian!"[6] Set in the fictional town of Zenith,

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[4]Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926, reprint, New York: Scribner's, 1986). On the role of Van Vechten in popularizing both the literature and cabaret life of Harlem, see Stephen Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 101-107.

[5]*The Girl from Bohemia*, 1918, dir. Lawrence B. McGill; *A Girl in Bohemia*, 1919, dir. Howard Mitchell; *Such Is Life in Greenwich Village*, 1919, dir. Henry Mayer; *La Boheme*, 1926, dir. King Vidor (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), starring Lillian Gish, based not on Giacomo Puccini's opera, due to copyright restrictions, but rather on the 1851 novel *The Latin Quarter* by Henri Murger; *Murder in Greenwich Village*, 1937, dir. Albert Rogell (Columbia Pictures); *Greenwich Village*, 1944, dir. Walter Lang (Twentieth-Century Fox). Information on these titles was gathered from the online version of *The All-Movie Guide* (http://www.allmovie.com) and the Internet Movie Database (http://imdb.com).

[6]Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1922, reprint, New York: Signet Classics, 1998), 318-319.

Ohio, this novel suggested that bohemianism was not the exclusive preserve of New York. By the late 1950s, the media portrayed the West Coast as the home of the beat generation, and enclaves in San Francisco and Los Angeles garnered substantial publicity as countercultural meccas. Furthermore, by this time an array of mass media, including not only newspapers, magazines and movies but also television, were poised to disseminate the attitudes and behavior of avant-garde intellectuals to a vast audience. As one journalist observed, the beat generation precipitated a "national furor and fascination" over bohemianism in postwar America.[7]

This chapter examines how mass-media representations of the beat generation depicted postwar bohemianism.[8] Newspapers in San Francisco and Los Angeles, as well as mass-circulation magazines, movies and television programs, adopted a wide array of perspectives in covering the beats. The media often assumed a hostile and dismissive tone, utilizing a contradictory binary to portray beatniks as either indolent loafers or dangerous psychopaths. However, the media also suggested that the habitues of North Beach and Venice augured a cultural shift in which adversarial attitudes and ways of life

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[7]George B. Leonard, Jr., "The Bored, the Bearded, and the Beat," *Look*, 19 August 1958, 68.

[8]Most studies of the beat generation devote little attention to the relationship between the beats and popular culture, except to briefly denounce the media for belittling avant-garde writers with beatnik stereotypes. In this regard, see especially Warren French, *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, 1955-1960* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), xix-xx, 40-43. On the influence of popular culture, including pulp magazines and movies, on beat writers, see Jaap van der Bent, "How Low Can You Go: The Beat Generation and American Popular Culture," in Rob Kroes, ed., *High Brow Meets Low Brow: American Culture as an Intellectual Concern* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Free University Press, 1988).

gained substantial cultural currency. Newspapers, magazines and movies also sent conflicting messages regarding homosexuals, African Americans and women in bohemian districts, suggesting that all three groups found both acceptance and prejudice in North Beach and Venice. Finally, in disseminating images of the beat generation, the mass media often deployed a voyeuristic perspective to promote bohemia as an arena of countercultural tourism. In particular, newspaper and magazine coverage titillated audiences with the unconventional behavior that flourished in the bohemian bars and coffeehouses of Los Angeles and San Francisco. This was especially apparent in portrayals of homosexuals and women, whom the media hinted could avail themselves of freedoms that were often not tolerated in more respectable environments.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, depictions of the beat generation in the mass media facilitated the dissemination of bohemian unconventionality into American popular culture. The inability of the media to arrive at definitive conclusions regarding the beat generation enabled a wide array images, stereotypes and assumptions about bohemians to proliferate in the postwar cultural landscape. One result was that audiences responded to portrayals of the beat generation with an astounding range of opinion, from bitter contempt to heartfelt praise, and proved remarkably capable of developing their own interpretations of popular culture imagery associated with bohemianism. Furthermore, as portrayed in the mass media, the beat generation was not primarily a literary avant-garde but an urban counterculture that expressed intense dissatisfactions with postwar society and enacted alternative ways of life. Significantly, the media depicted the beat generation

as a decidedly California phenomenon: with few exceptions, coverage of the beats focused not on the venerable bohemian stronghold of New York but rather on San Francisco and Los Angeles.

From Bohemian to Beatnik

The "beat generation" emerged in the pages of American newspapers and magazines in 1957, with the appearance of *On the Road*. Before this, mass-print media coverage of both the *Howl* controversy and the literary milieu of San Francisco rarely mentioned any "beat" group or phenomenon.[9] One of the first uses of the term in print occurred in July 1957, when the *San Francisco Examiner* interviewed Kerouac regarding the impending publication of his second novel, and briefly noted that he belonged to "the 'beat generation'– this being a sort of equivalent in its affinity for jazz and disillusionment to the 'lost generation' of the 1920s."[10] Yet neither Kerouac nor the beat generation gained fame until September, when a review of the novel in the *New York Times* proclaimed that just as *The Sun Also Rises* "came to be regarded as the testament of

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[9]See, for example, coverage of both the San Francisco literary scene and bohemianism in North Beach in the following articles, none of which reference the beat generation: George Murphy, "What's Phony–and What's True?" *San Francisco News*, 26 September 1957, sec. 1, p. 6; George Murphy, "'Pseudoes' Flourish Amid S. F. Tolerance," *San Francisco News*, 27 September 1957, sec. 2, p. 26; Michael Grieg, "The Lively Arts in San Francisco," *Mademoiselle*, February 1957, 142; "Big Day for Bards at Bay," *Life*, 9 September 1957, 105-108.

[10]Luther Nichols, "Writing Novels by the Foot," *San Francisco Examiner*, 17 July 1957, no sec., n. p., "Kerouac, Jack" envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings Morgue, San Francisco History Center (hereafter cited as *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC).

the 'Lost Generation,' so it seems certain that 'On the Road' will come to be known as that of the 'Beat Generation.'"[11] With a glowing review in the most important newspaper in the nation, the beat generation had arrived. When *Playboy* magazine featured several articles on the beats the following February, it was the beginning of a mass-media sensation that made the "beat generation" a household term.[12]

The literature of the beat generation was quickly overshadowed by the antics of "beatniks," a term widely used by the summer of 1958 to denote the hangers-on who imitated the dress and behavior of avant-garde intellectuals but were themselves lazy, untalented dilettantes. Few journalists in America were more influential in this regard than Herb Caen. A columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Caen labeled the bohemians of North Beach "beatniks," revealing that the mass media adopted an increasingly negative and dismissive tone toward the beat generation as it sought to distinguish the talented few from the pretending hordes.[13] In the wake of the launch of

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[11]Gilbert Millstein, Review of *On the Road*, *New York Times*, 5 September 1957, rpt. in Ann Charters, ed., *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 410.

[12]"The Beat Mystique," *Playboy*, February 1958, 20.

[13]Caen, "Pocketful of Notes," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 April 1958, sec. 2, p. 15. The precise date that Caen first used "beatnik" is unclear. He later claimed that he first used the term in the fall of 1957, but my review of the *Chronicle* for the months of October, November and December in 1957 found no references to "beatniks" by Caen. Caen claimed he coined the term in the fall of 1957 in a letter to Henri Lenoir (owner of North Beach bar Vesuvio's). This letter lacks a complete date, but its position in Lenoir's scrapbook suggests it dates from the mid 1960s. See Henri Lenoir Scrapbooks, 1941-1965, Volume II, p. 48, Henri Lenoir Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. On 23 October 1969, in his *Chronicle* column, Caen recalled that he coined the term "about the same time the late Jack Kerouac was writing his classic 'On

the Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union in October 1957, Caen used the Yiddish suffix to give "beat" a new connotation: in essence, Caen suggested a distinction between beats, serious writers whose unconventionality was merely an outward manifestation of their more substantive creative personalities, and beatniks, whose fascination with the accouterments of bohemia thinly veiled their inability to create art and their preoccupation with posing as sophisticated rebels. Although Caen harbored no extreme animosity toward the beats, he provided ammunition for those who did. Although many journalists, editors and Hollywood producers sympathized with avant-garde writers who defeated the puerile forces of censorship, they despised posers who talked constantly of

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the Road,'" reflecting Caen's assumption that the novel was written shortly before it was published and that Caen created the term at that time, i.e. the fall of 1957. See "Kerouac, Jack" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC. In a retrospective on Caen shortly after his death, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reprinted the article of 2 April 1958, noting that "in it he coined the term word [sic] 'Beatnik.'" See Caen, "Pocket Full of Notes," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 February 1997, sec. B, p. 1, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file–/c/a/1997/02/06/MN18715.DTL, accessed from the internet 24 June 2003. Steven Watson cites the Caen column from 2 April 1958 as the source for Caen's claim that both Sputnik and the beats were "equally far out," although this latter phrase does not appear in the column of 2 April 1958; see Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (1995; reprint, New York: Pantheon, 1998), 4, 264, 349 n. 3. *Playboy* published one of the first feature stories by a large-circulation magazine on the Beat Generation in February 1958, including three lengthy articles, none of which use "beatnik." Nor did Art Cohn use the term when he denounced the beats in a *San Francisco Examiner* article entitled "Sick Little Bums," published 26 February 1958, and the term did not appear in the three-part series on the beat generation published by the *Examiner* in May 1958. The following month, the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a series entitled "Life and Love among the Beatniks," and the term was used widely thereafter in both newspaper and magazine accounts of the beats. There was far more publicity devoted to the beat generation in the spring of 1958 than in the fall of 1957, and thus it is likely but not certain that Caen first used the term in April 1958 rather than in the fall of 1957.

poetry and nonconformity but seemed capable of neither. The media rarely made overt comparisons between beats and beatniks, yet this distinction formed the implicit conceptual lens through which they portrayed postwar bohemianism.

Idlers, Psychopaths, and Ambivalence

The sudden popularity of the beat generation occurred at a moment when the mass media in America underwent substantial transformations. Most important was the rise of television: between 1948 and 1955, televisions were installed in two-thirds of American homes, and by the end of the decade 90 percent of all households in the U.S. had at least one TV.[14] The rapid ubiquity of television forced other media outlets to target subgroups of the national audience in order to survive.[15] Yet other media retained a substantial presence. By the late 1950s, mass-circulation magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, *Time*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* each maintained annual circulations in the millions, while more narrowly focused publications like *Playboy* targeted specific market segments.[16] Similarly, movie studios competed with TV by producing blockbuster epics with lavish sets, huge budgets and visual effects that could only be appreciated on the big screen, and by the later 1960s Hollywood brought sexually explicit content, violence, and

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[14]Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

[15]James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (second ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xiv, xvii.

[16]"Top 30 in Mags Circulation War," *Variety*, 21 October 1959, 17.

rough language to movies that was too controversial for television, with its mass audience of all ages.[17] The sudden rise of television did not mean that other mass media became obsolete: the circulation of *Life* rose throughout the 1960s, in part because its color photographs successfully competed with the black-and-white TVs found in most homes.[18]

Newspapers faced a more difficult challenge in the postwar decades, as they not only faced competition from television but also had to contend with suburbanization. Before the war, people taking public transportation often read evening editions during the commute, but the migration of hundreds of thousands of Americans from inner cities to suburbs and the growing reliance on cars for transportation meant that increasing numbers of people had less desire to purchase evening editions. Afternoon traffic congestion also made delivering evening papers to suburban subscribers more time consuming and costly.[19] This was especially true in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, where the proportion of people residing in L.A. County declined from 54 percent in 1940 to 38 percent in 1960, as the construction of freeways to outlying areas like Santa Monica, the San Fernando Valley, Pasadena and San Pedro stimulated the growth of suburbs and peripheral cities.[20] Yet here too the situation was not entirely negative. Although the number of cities with two or more dailies declined during the 1950s, the

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[17]Baughman, *Republic of Mass Culture*, xiv, 83, 139-140.

[18]Ibid., 128.

[19]Ibid., 61-62.

[20]Ibid.

number of cities with at least one daily rose (as suburbanites desired more local coverage).[21] Furthermore, while circulation per household declined (as fewer families subscribed to a paper), overall newspaper circulation rose during this decade, in part because many people utilized TV for entertainment but continued to rely on newspapers to stay abreast of current events.[22] Newspapers certainly suffered greater losses than other mass media, but they continued to reach millions of readers. Thus by the late 1950s, the mass media was especially suited to disseminate adversarial assumptions and behavior through an array of outlets, including television, movies, magazines and newspapers.

One of the most conservative newspapers chains in America was that of William Randolph Hearst, and his West Coast flagship, the *San Francisco Examiner*, was one of the first papers in California to denounce the beat generation. In February 1958, the *Examiner* rebuked the "Jehovah of the Beaten," who "kill, for the sake of killing," "defile all flesh," "destroy the innocent," and "make a mockery of morality, justice, law, common fairness and, most of all, love." The beat generation, with its "spurious philosophy," chose to "resign from the human race" and "contribute nothing to the world except scorn."[23] Several months later, the *Examiner* ran a front-page series that portrayed the beats as occasionally cruel but more often lazy, pretentious and selfish. The beat generation of San Francisco "guzzles beer" and "calls itself Bohemian" but in reality it

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[21]Ibid., 59-60.

[22]Ibid., 59-61.

[23]Art Cohn, "Sick Little Bums," *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 February 1958, no sec., n. p., "Kerouac, Jack" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

"creates nothing" and "does nothing" except engage in an endless "chatter that fills their empty days."[24] Beats were extraordinarily self-absorbed individuals who "dance" to the "tune played by the Pied Piper of self-delusion."[25] Yet the beats of North Beach were also "dangerous to outsiders."[26] On one occasion beatniks locked a claustrophobic man in a closet and "laughed and laughed while he screamed and screamed," after which he "slashed the tires of every car in the block with an ice pick."[27] Overall, the *Examiner* depicted the beat generation in discrepant extremes: insignificant yet dangerous, indifferent yet hostile, people who either posed a serious threat to conventional values or merely posed.

One month after the *Examiner* feature, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a front-page series on the beats that distinguished sharply between genuine bohemians and beatnik pretenders. The "Beat Generation is divided into two parts," with nothing in common beyond inhabiting the same "strange North Beach world."[28] The first group consisted of "loners," people "celebrated by Jack Kerouac" who "are in constant, frantic

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[24]June Muller, "'Beat Generation' Thrives on Talk," *San Francisco Examiner*, 6 May 1958, sec. 1, p. 25.

[25]June Muller, "Disillusioned Years Hit 'Beat Generation,'" *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 May 1958, sec. 1, p. 1;

[26]June Muller, "'Beat Generation' Finds Mecca in S.F.," *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 May 1958, sec. 1, p. 1.

[27]Muller, "Disillusioned Years," sec. 1, p. 1.

[28]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 4 and 15 June 1958, 4.

movement, trying to dig everything."[29] The loners "are Beat because they feel battered by life" and "have lost faith in nearly everything, and they refuse to conform to the ideals in which they no longer believe."[30] Instead they contented themselves with "getting high at marijuana parties or deliriously intoxicated anywhere and everywhere with a sharpened awareness of sights and sounds and smells."[31] Yet such people, "caring nothing for politics" and remaining "too cool, too indifferent, too pseudo-intellectual to care" about much of anything, felt "angry" and "spiteful" and very often found themselves "wanting–sometimes desperately–to die."[32] Against these loners, the *Chronicle* juxtaposed "the true Beatnik" who "just loafs and talks–not caring about life at all."[33] The "chief occupation" of beatniks was the "endless and almost inarticulate" conversation that centered on the "destructive criticism of everything."[34] Yet the "sitters and squatters of Upper Grant Avenue don't care enough about life to dig it, to understand it or be excited about it."[35] The paper posited a sharp antagonism between these two groups, observing that the "serious poets and authors" of North Beach "bitterly resent the

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[29]Ibid., 22 June 1958, 4.

[30]Ibid., 15 June 1958, 4.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., 22 June 1958, 4.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

impression that every nonconformist in the area is a member of the Beat Generation."[36] Yet the *Chronicle* seemed more concerned with beatniks than with the "serious" artists and writers. The very title of the series, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," betrayed a fascination not with the loners but rather with the posers who loafed their days away in bistros and cafes, as if they were the real story. Moreover, despite the insistence that loners and beatniks differed substantially, the *Chronicle* implicitly highlighted their similarities: both groups were alienated, isolated and incapable of attaining any tangible sense of fulfillment or meaning in life, whether they made the "serious" effort to dig everything or remained "pale shadows."[37] Indeed, all of these bohemians maintained a set of improbable balancing acts: debilitating apathy versus anger and spite, vacuous nihilism versus intense desperation, and the rejection of politics versus the endless criticism of contemporary society.

Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* utilized a contradictory binary to portray beats as simultaneously passive and active. The *Times* noted that "a true Beat must accept everything passively and not waste his precious emotion," yet beatniks also exhibited "odd antisocial behavior" and a "refusal to engage in any worthwhile pursuit."[38] The beats rejected the "values, the aims, the beliefs" of postwar America because they felt it "dealt them wars, hypocrisy, and cruelty" and offered them "gods in which they cannot

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[36]Ibid., 15 June 1958, 5, 4.

[37]Ibid., 22 June 1958, 4.

[38]Joe Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," *This Week* (Sunday magazine supplement to *Los Angeles Times*), 28 September 1958, 5, 33.

believe and a logic which they cannot refute but which in no way helps them to live their lives."[39] Furthermore, they were "nihilists" who "want no responsibilities and no laws" but also "hedonists" who "don't care whether something is good or evil as long as it is enjoyable," and they felt that "death is preferable to life" because "in death one is truly left alone."[40] Thus the beatniks of the *Los Angeles Times*, like those found in San Francisco newspapers, embodied a set of contradictory characteristics: extremely passive but virulently antisocial, apathetic but intensely disturbed by postwar society.

Among mass-circulation magazines, *Life* offered one of the lengthiest and most critical exposes on the beat generation. The magazine rebuked the beats as "writers who cannot write" and "painters who cannot paint," people who "deluded themselves into believing their lugubrious absurdities are art."[41] These "talkers, loafers, passive little con men" persisted in "bawling of individuality" yet mimicked one another "as solemnly as preschool tots."[42] The handful of writers who displayed genuine talent were "individualistic and antisocial to the point of neuroticism," and with their "calculated vulgarity" they appeared "more intent on revenging themselves on the squares and yowling [sic] at the world than on triumphs of literary composition."[43] For *Life*, the beats

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[39]Ibid., 5.

[40]Ibid., 5, 33.

[41]Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life*, 30 November 1959, 119, 124.

[42]Ibid., 119, 126.

[43]Ibid., 119, 116, 126.

simply could not substantiate their claims: they prattled endlessly about art and literature but produced little work of substance, they obsessively denounced conformity but enforced their own rigid codes of conduct, and they valued poetry as social critique rather than aesthetic achievement.

Time was even more negative in its portrayals of beat authors as spokesmen for psychopaths and posers. Book reviews in the magazine tended to dismiss individual beat writers very hastily in order to focus on ridiculing the culture from which they came. *Time* insisted that the "beat blather certainly is not literature," calling Kerouac the "latrine laureate of Hobohemia" and Ginsberg a "discount-house Whitman."[44] The beat underworld included "fancy-talking young bums" and a few "hipsterical" individuals who together formed an "oddball fringe of social misfits" engaged in a "passive resistance to society."[45] The typical beat was a either a "model psychopath" and "chronic manic-depressive" or an "urban waif in the asphalt jungle" who "regularly tastes despair."[46] Such people experienced "H-bomb jitters" with such intensity that they valorized "self as the only reality" and cultivated "sensation as the only goal."[47] For *Time*, the beats were often ludicrous and occasionally tragic but not significant as writers or rebels.

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[44]"Bang Bong Bing," *Time*, 7 September 1959, 80; "The Blazing & [sic] the Beat," *Time*, 24 February 1958, 104; "The Disorganization Man," *Time*, 9 June 1958, 100.

[45]"Beat Mystics," *Time*, 3 February 1958, 56; "Blazing & the Beat," 104.

[46]"Disorganization Man," 100

[47]Ibid., 102.

In contrast, *Look* took a more nuanced approach and reported that beats maintained a passive yet critical outlook and attained a substantial appeal among the public. As "fugitives from the great American middle class," beatniks chose to "retire for a while from the rat race of everyday living."[48] Only a few pursued artistic or literary creativity while the majority embraced the "personal drama of doing absolutely nothing."[49] Yet the beat worldview constituted the "average American's value scale–turned inside out," which meant "*not* watching TV, *not* wearing gray flannel, *not* owning a home in the suburbs and especially–*not* working."[50] Moreover, while earlier bohemias in Paris and Greenwich Village garnered the interest of some "solid citizens," *Look* found a "deeper significance" in the beats, whose "complete denial of middle-class values" caused an "overblown national furor and fascination" and generated a "special attraction" among the public.[51] *Look* suggested that the estrangement of beatniks from middle-class conformity would be brief and that their indolence led to self-absorption, yet contradictorily asserted that the beat version of unconventionality resonated in America to an extent that surpassed public interest in earlier bohemias. In short, the beat generation seemed simultaneously to be fleeting and irrelevant yet to augur a fundamental change in the history of bohemianism.

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[48]Leonard, "The Bored, the Bearded, and the Beat," 65.

[49]Ibid., 67.

[50]Ibid., 65. Emphasis Leonard's.

[51]Ibid., 68.

Movies about the beats often presented sharp juxtapositions of passivity and criminality among bohemians.[52] A case in point is *The Beat Generation*, in which most beatniks are vacuous and submissive, sitting on the floors of coffeehouses with blank-facial expressions, listening to poets herald "kicks that destroy without killing."[53] Yet the main beatnik character is a serial rapist. He hangs out in coffeehouses but regards the beat generation as the "phony" veneer of "would-be artistic slobs," and his own belief system is "whatever comes in handy" in the pursuit of "my own kinda kicks." Producer

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[52]Among the many movies from the late 1950s and early 1960s with beat characters and themes are the 1958 releases *High School Confidential*, *Bell, Book, and Candle*, and *I Want to Live*; *The Rebel Set*, *Gidget*, and Frank Capra's *Hole in the Head* in 1959; *Visit to a Small Planet*, *Bells Are Ringing*, and *The Hypnotic Eye* in 1960; Billy Wilder's *One, Two, Three* (1961); *The Party's Over* (1962); the 1963 productions *For Love or Money*, *Greenwich Village Story*, *Mouse on the Moon*, *My Six Loves*, and *Take Her She's Mine*; and the 1964 releases *For Those Who Think Young* and *The Flesh Eaters* (1964), as well as British productions such as *Espresso Bongo* (1959), *Beat Girl* (1960) and *Saturday Night Out* (1964). For a partial list, see Michael J. Weldon, "Mondo Bongo: A Guide to Beat 'Sploitation Flicks," in the booklet accompanying the compact disc box set, *The Beat Generation* (Santa Monica, CA: Rhino Records, 1992), 47-51.

The film scholar David Sterritt analyzes the movies and television programs discussed in this chapter, but his main concern to highlight how Hollywood exploited and distorted the ideas and lives of the beat avant-garde, very narrowly defined as the holy trinity of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. While this framework often provides for insightful readings of links between individual films and the literature of the beat generation, it both marginalizes the many beat writers who did not attain celebrity status and moreover fails to consider any oppositional or adversarial potential within popular culture texts, however much they maligned the intent of artists and writers. Furthermore, Sterritt does not examine at length how Hollywood movies portrayed the broader countercultural milieu of which avant-garde writers were a part, nor does he assess how actual viewers and contemporary critics responded. See Sterritt, *Mad to Be Saved: The Beats, the '50s, and Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 140-152, 165-169; and Sterritt, *Screening the Beats: Media Culture and the Beat Sensibility* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 18-20.

[53]*The Beat Generation*, VHS, dir. Charles Haas, prod. Albert Zugsmith (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959; copy in author's possession).

Albert Zugsmith, known for a plethora of quickly made and cheaply financed films like *High School Confidential*, *Sex Kittens Go to College*, and *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, obviously sought to exploit the beats via the lurid tale of a criminal psychopath.[54] Yet the overall depiction of bohemians in this film is strikingly inconsistent: the overwhelming majority are passive malcontents who present no greater threat than hackneyed poetry, yet the beat milieu harbors dangerous criminals capable of extreme violence. If most beatniks posed no danger, the beat generation itself certainly did.

Similarly, the movie *A Bucket of Blood* suggests that the intellectual snobbery of bohemia is so intense that some people are willing to commit murder in order to gain recognition as artists. Roger Corman, a virtual powerhouse of production, distribution and development in Hollywood, spent an evening hanging out in Sunset Strip coffeehouses, developed an idea for a movie, and completed filming in five days.[55] The

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[54]Ephraim Katz, revised by Fred Klein and Ronald Dean Nolan, *The Film Encyclopedia* (third ed., New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 1506, 495.

[55]Corman completed nine movies in 1957 alone, gave young talents such as Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, Jack Nicholson and Robert Towne some of their first opportunities to direct, act or write in Hollywood, and distributed to American audiences films by Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini. In the middle of 1959, American International Pictures wanted Corman to make a horror movie but had only $50,000 available for the project. As Corman recalled, he accepted the offer in part to see if he could trounce his previous record of filming an entire movie in only six days, but also because he wanted to "create a comedy-horror-satire about the trendy beat coffeehouse scene." He and writer Charles Griffith, a longtime collaborator, "spent a long evening drifting in and out of coffeehouses along the Sunset Strip," and "by evening's end, had a plot structure" for the movie. The raucous five-day shoot, during which "everyone was coming up with ideas as we went and we just tossed them in," included a burst of spontaneous applause from the set crew after filming a poetry-reading

protagonist, Walter, buses tables at a café where pretentious aesthetes gather to gab about art and soak up sophistication. Walter lacks creative talent but longs for the praise and respect that coffeehouse regulars bestow upon painters and poets. After accidentally killing a cat, he decides to cover its body in clay and claim it as an original sculpture, a ploy that brings him instant praise as a budding sculptor. Then Walter kills an undercover narcotics agent and makes a sculpture that the coffeehouse critics hail as a work of realist brilliance. Walter murders several more people, until somebody notices a human finger beneath the clay and Walter, now revealed as a fraud, commits suicide.[56] Walter is the bohemian as psychopath-in-waiting, a man who goes from being kind, gentle and amiable to stopping at nothing to acquire more and more adulation. Bohemians like Walter have such fragile egos and so little ability to deal with their unfulfilled ambitions that they resort to violent crime in order to attain respect and dignity. Like *The Beat Generation*, *A Bucket of Blood* presents the overall bohemian milieu as vacuous but suggests that some of its members harbor violent criminal tendencies.

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scene. See Katz, *Film Encyclopedia*, 295; Leonard Maltin, ed., *Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia* (New York: Dutton, 1994), 173; Mark Thomas McGee, *Roger Corman: The Best of Cheap Acts* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988), 29; all quotations from Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: Random House, 1999), 62-63.

[56]*A Bucket of Blood*, VHS, dir. and prod. Roger Corman (American International Pictures/Orion Pictures, 1959; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2000).

Television presented a far tamer version of the beat generation.[57] One reason for this was that with its mass audience of both adults and children, network executives always walked a fine line between titillating viewers and practicing self-censorship in order to avoid both greater government oversight and angering audiences with provocative content.[58] Furthermore, as Marshall McLuhan argued, the "cool" medium of television was, at least from the vantage point of the mid 1960s, an instrument of "low definition" in which "so little is given and so much has to be filled in" by a "creatively participant response," a medium that "rejects the sharp personality and favors the presentation of processes rather than products."[59] Within this framework, depictions of the beat generation on television eschewed the clear-cut denunciations and derogatory satire found in the print media and movies in favor of far more sanitized versions of the oppositional potential of bohemianism.

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[57]Programs not discussed here that contained beat themes and influences include *Johnny Staccato* (NBC and ABC, 1959-1960), which featured a private detective who was also jazz pianist and performed at a club in Greenwich Village. The detective was played by John Cassavetes, who as an independent filmmaker went on to make critically-acclaimed works such as *Shadows* and *Faces*. Another program with an even stronger beat influence was *77 Sunset Strip*, which aired on ABC from 1958 to 1964 and focused on the glamorous exploits of two private detectives in Los Angeles. The program initially included a young hipster named Kookie to provide comic relief, but Kookie became a central character and helped the show crack the top 10 in its second season, while the actor who played him, Edd Byrnes, recorded a spin-off novelty song with Connie Stevens that became a hit. See Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 523, 908.

[58]Baughman, *Republic of Mass Culture*, 108-109, 149.

[59]Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964, reprint, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 22-23, 336, 309.

One of the most famous televised beatniks was neither a dangerous criminal nor a lackadaisical poet but rather a comical sidekick. In *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, which aired on CBS from 1959 to 1963 and broke into the top 30 for two seasons, the protagonist pursues a series of girlfriends as a student in high school and later college.[60] His friend Maynard G. Krebs embodies all of the benign beatnik caricatures, sporting a goatee, shuddering in horror at the mention of "work," dressing in loose-fitting dungarees and a tattered sweatshirt, pounding away at bongo drums, prefacing almost every statement with "like," and using a healthy dose of hipster slang, including "cat," "swing," "man," "crazy," "pad," "gas" and "Daddy-O."[61] Yet beyond his lingo, clothing and comic clumsiness, there is little to distinguish Maynard from either Dobie or any other young adult in high school or college. In one episode, Maynard gets his hand caught in a gum machine inside the Gillis family store and decides to sue Dobie's father Herbert. Here Maynard displays greed and an utter disregard for other people, even wearing a fake-arm brace as a "sneaky trick to get more money out of that insurance company."[62] Temperamentally incapable of lying for very long, Maynard realizes the error of his ways,

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[60]Brooks and Marsh, *Complete Directory to Prime Time*, 626-627, 1246-1247. The show was based on a collection of short stories written by Max Schulman, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis: Eleven Campus Stories* (1951; reprint, Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1953).

[61]"The Big Sandwich," *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, 30 March 1960, VHS (Baker City, OR: Nostalgia Family Video, 1997). All subsequent citations of this program refer to Nostalgia VHS releases. Dates shown are not air dates but rather dates production began for that episode, per "Dobie Gillis Episode List," http://home1.gte.net/res09cc9/guide.htm, accessed from the internet 18 June 2003.

[62]"Move Over, Perry Mason," *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, 13 October 1961.

telling Dobie that "I've been like a blind fool," admitting to "modest greed" and asking Herbert for forgiveness.[63] Thus Maynard overcomes his initial selfishness by gaining a new appreciation both for Herbert and for his friendship with Dobie. As often happens with Dobie, Maynard himself learns a valuable lesson and vows never to make the same mistake again. Paradoxically, one of the most famous beatnik characters of all time differs sharply from both the criminal psychopaths and irredeemable loafers so often found in mass-media depictions of the beat generation. Maynard exhibits many of the humorous affectations of beatniks but little of their abrasiveness and none of their criminality, and his capacity to learn from his mistakes and feel genuine concern for others stands in stark contrast to many popular portrayals of bohemians in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

No television show exploited beat literature more blatantly than *Route 66*. Created by Herbert B. Leonard and Sterling Silliphant, the program aired on CBS from 1960 to 1964, cracking the top 30 for two seasons.[64] It features two young men who journey throughout America in their convertible Corvette, in search of adventure, beautiful women and anyone who needs a helping hand. Kerouac thought it was such a flagrant ripoff of *On the Road* that he twice asked attorneys to sue Silliphant for plagiarism, but on both occasions they found insufficient grounds for a lawsuit.[65] The

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[63] Ibid.

[64]Brooks and Marsh, *Complete Directory to Prime Time*, 874, 1246-1247;

[65]Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America* (New York: Random House, 1979), 272.

protagonists, Buz Murdock and Tod Stiles, certainly mirror both the novel and its author. Buz bares a striking physical resemblance to Kerouac, with his dark hair and rugged good looks. Moreover, in one crucial respect Buz and Tod respectively mimic Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the protagonists of *On the Road*: Buz, like Sal, usually rides in the passenger seat while Tod, like Dean, drives. Yet the personalities of these characters undermine such facile comparisons, as Buz, unlike Sal, tends to be impulsive and focused on the immediate present, while Tod, unlike Dean, is level headed, frugal and often planning for the future. When they leave a boarding house for a deluxe room at a Hilton, Tod worries about running out of money, but Buz insists they have plenty of cash and should enjoy the moment.[66] Furthermore, the self-reflexive ruminations on becoming a great writer that often appear in *On the Road* do not emerge in *Route 66*. Buz and Tod occasionally refer to classical literary works, as when Buz says, "you know what's the matter with you, Tod? You've stopped unhinging rainbows" (something Sal would never say to Dean).[67] Yet beyond such sporadic allusions to characters like Don Quixote or Hamlet, Buz and Tod exhibit no concern with artistic creativity nor demonstrate any sustained interest in literature. Nonetheless, the carefree wanderlust of two young men who drive across America in search of whatever lies ahead definitely evokes Sal and Dean.

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[66]"Sheba," *Route 66*, 6 January 1961, VHS (Terra Haute, IN: Columbia House, 1995). All subsequent citations of this program refer to Columbia House VHS releases. Airdates obtained from Columbia House videocassettes.

[67]"How Much a Pound Is Albatross?" *Route 66*, 9 February 1962.

Indeed, a central theme of *Route 66*, as of *On the Road*, is that constant movement enables individuals to understand both the world and themselves, although the motivation of these protagonists is not the manic restlessness of Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise but rather a much more benign desire for youthful adventure and the altruistic willingness to assist the downtrodden. In the first episode, Buz explains his world view to the resident of a small Mississippi town: "You live it the way you feel it. When it moves, you go with it."[68] In another episode, when Buz and Tod befriend a female ex-convict, Buz tells her that "Most people are in jail of one kind or another, but they don't know about it" (dialogue in the show, usually written by Silliphant, often included hackneyed aphorisms such as this).[69] In that same episode a man says, "Experience isn't just what happens to a person. Experience is making what happens to you count."[70] For Tod and Buz, fulfillment comes not from a stable career or a spacious home in the suburbs but rather from meeting new people, seeing new places and seizing whatever the day has to offer. Furthermore, their journeys often bring them into contact with people who exhibit a disdain for superficial appearances and false pretenses. In one episode, a woman falsely accused of a crime denounces the artificial pleasantry of co-workers who believe she is guilty but do not risk asking her about it: "I can stand anything except those smiling faces,

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[68]"Black November," *Route 66*, 7 October 1960.

[69]"Sheba," *Route 66*.

[70]Ibid.

forgiving me. The calculated niceness, the deliberate not mentioning it."[71] Buz and Tod often gravitate toward people like this woman, individuals who have some sort of cross to bear that heightens their disdain for contrived facades and banal human interaction. Thus their weekly adventures bring them into contact with people who, like themselves, express subtle but pointed critiques of conformity and mediocrity.

Yet if Buz and Tod share the wanderlust of *On the Road*, they display few of the superficial accouterments that the mass media typically ascribed to beatniks. They and other characters occasionally use hipster slang such as "dig," "cooled me," "let's cut out," and "flipped," but such lingo does not pervade the program.[72] Moreover, their appearance is conventional, with nice slacks, tucked in dress shirts and clean shaven faces, and in one episode Buz sports a sweater tied around his neck that would make any country club preppie proud.[73] Indeed, Buz and Tod are the antithesis of the bongo-drumming, doggerel-spouting, sullen beatnik so often caricatured in the mass media. When they help a heroin junkie overcome his addiction, a police detective warns them not to, saying "the public seems to think that addicts are beatniks, poets, musicians, way out types who shoot for kicks. Oh sure, we get a few of those too, but most of our trade is stuff like this baby here, just a bag of bones, more of a menace to himself than anybody

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[71]Ibid.

[72]"Bird Cage on My Foot," *Route 66*, 13 October 1961; "Sheba," *Route 66*.

[73]"Sheba," *Route 66*.

else."[74] This is one of few occasions when the program invokes the beats overtly, yet here beatniks are linked to artists and "way out types," not to habitual drug abusers or to clean-cut men like Buz and Tod. Thus the show distances itself from the beat generation even as it appropriates one of the canonical works of beat literature. *Route 66* is one of very few instances in which the mass media exploited the beat generation without resorting to the stereotypical banalities so often associated with beatniks. Moreover, *Route 66* portrays individuals who disregard many typical trappings of success in postwar America, including suburban family life, stable careers and ever rising levels of commodity consumption. With dialogue such as "Most people are in jail of one kind or another, but they don't know about it," the show presents saccharine self-help that can apply to nearly anyone and, with a numbing felicity, sanitizes bohemian alternatives for mass consumption. Yet by invoking "calculated niceness" and "smiling faces" that mask underlying contempt, the show directly references critiques of the artificiality of postwar culture that beat writers themselves articulated. In doing so, it accords the search for more rewarding ways of life a legitimacy rarely found in other mass-media depictions of the beat generation.

Television was not the only mass medium that eschewed derisive stereotypes in its portrayal of the beat generation. Among newspapers, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* was unique in providing far more sympathetic and thorough coverage of the beats than virtually any other paper in Los Angeles or San Francisco. Neither the *Los Angeles*

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[74]"Bird Cage on My Foot," *Route 66*.

Examiner, part of the ultra-conservative media chain of William Randolph Hearst, nor the *Los Angeles Times*, owned by the Chandler newspaper dynasty and for decades the leading promoter of Los Angeles as a haven of white middle-class home ownership and restorative sunshine, had any desire to praise the bohemians of L.A. Yet the *Mirror News*, despite being owned by the Chandlers, was a different kind of newspaper. Norman Chandler began the *Los Angeles Mirror* in 1948 to appeal to the Dust Bowl migrants and industrial workers who poured into Los Angeles during the Depression and World War II. Aware that many of these new residents disliked the strictly pro-Republican and anti-labor stance of the *Times*, Chandler began the *Mirror* to compete with the more liberal *Daily News* and to draw readers away from an afternoon paper published by Hearst. In following years the circulation of the *Daily News* declined steadily, and Chandler bought it and created the *Mirror News* in 1954. In contrast to the stern conservatism and white middle-class orientation of the *Times*, the *Mirror News* had a more liberal outlook, at least within the context of southern California politics, and was one of the first white-owned newspapers in L.A. to devote substantial coverage to the Latino and African-American communities in the city.[75]

The *Mirror News* portrayed Los Angeles beats as people who made a serious

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[75]Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: Putnam, 1977), 286-287, 292-293; Rob Leicester Wagner, *Red Ink, White Lies: The Rise and Fall of Los Angeles Newspapers, 1920-1960* (Upland, CA: Dragonflyer Press, 2000), 10, 13; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990; New York: Vintage, 1992), 25.

effort to find genuine alternatives to the conformist values they found throughout postwar America. The eclectic beat generation of L.A. included "juvenile delinquents, hot-rodders, narcotics addicts," "fuzzy-faced high school boys of 17, college students in rebellion against the formalism of academic training, bewhiskered and tattooed veterans of our last two wars and young fugitives from advertising and publicity offices."[76] Although the paper called Venice the "unwitting community center," it also noted that the beat generation flourished throughout Los Angles, including "Hollywood, on the Sunset Strip and in the canyons."[77] Furthermore, while the *Mirror News* distinguished between the "representative" artists and writers in Venice and the "several thousands [sic] eager to embrace" the beat generation "as a fad," the paper emphasized that both groups shared "a disaffiliation from what they call 'the rat race' of middle-class life."[78] The beats aspired to "a cultivation of dedicated poverty," an "intensification of sensory experience," an "interest in Zen Buddhism" and an "over-all unification by jazz music."[79] In sum, the beat generation was a multifaceted group of people who rejected suburban tranquility and endless commodity consumption in favor of intense and immediate experience, oriental religion and jazz music. Moreover, the *Mirror News* reported that the nonconformity of

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[76]Frank Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 18 June 1958, sec. 1 p. 3.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Laro, "Beat Generation Asks Dedication to Principles," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 19 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 3; Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1, p. 3.

[79]Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1, p. 3.

L.A. beats was moderate and balanced. Only "a few" used marijuana and "alcohol plays a very minor part in their social life."[80] Life among Venice beats was "an existence barren of automobiles, new clothing, sports and popular entertainments (exclusive of jazz), with one-room pads furnished with a secondhand [sic] mattress and perhaps one chair."[81] Although "dishes, it seems, must never be washed," the salient point was that life inside the typical beat pad centered around art, literature and jazz, not the stereotypically dirty and shabby appearance of those who lived there.[82] The paper even endorsed the beats in an editorial, arguing that "it's easy to scorn them as misfits and nonconformists in an era too much given to stereotypes," but insisting that "fresh blood is needed in our intellectual arteries, after an enervating series of conflicts and crises."[83] Virtually alone among major newspapers in Los Angeles or San Francisco, the *Mirror News* found in the beat generation a much needed antidote to the conformity and mediocrity that seemed to permeate so much of American life in the late 1950s.

Similarly, not all magazines adopted a dismissive tone toward the beat generation, as *Playboy* demonstrated in portraying the beats as a very eclectic phenomenon that included affluent urban sophisticates as well financially strapped poets. In contrast to

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[80]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home on Coast," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 20 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 4; Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1, p. 3.

[81]Laro, "Beat Generation Asks Dedication," sec. 1, p. 1.

[82]Ibid.

[83]"Heartbeat of 'Beat Generation,'" *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 23 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 13.

magazines such as *Life*, *Look* and *Time*, who sought the broadest audience possible and published material designed to be of general interest to many readers, *Playboy* promoted itself as a guide for sophisticated, single men who wanted to stay informed about the latest trends and tastes.[84] Within this modus operandi, *Playboy* published the work of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Corso but also presented beats as upscale and urbane young professionals.[85] *Playboy* was among the first large-circulation magazines to champion the beat generation, which it celebrated from the outset as a broad based cultural phenomenon that influenced every crevice of American life. The magazine opined that "the term Beat Generation is an apt coinage to characterize the angry, roving youngsters whom writers like Kerouac have caught in print," but noted that "our definition of beat is a little broader than some" and insisted that "beat is a national phenomenon which knows no barriers of age–or economic or social status" but rather "infiltrates all levels of our society."[86] Reporting on a "cool swinging" in an unspecified part of New York, *Playboy* downplayed the "dirty-neck beat cats," the "Kerouac cats" who are destitute and addicted

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[84]On *Playboy* and postwar masculinity, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1983), chap. 4; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 254-257.

[85]Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," *Playboy*, June 1959, 31-32, 42, 79; Allen Ginsberg, "To Lindsay" and Gregory Corso, "Made by Hand," *Playboy*, July 1959, 45.

[86]"The Beat Mystique," *Playboy*, February 1958, 20; "Playbill," *Playboy*, July 1959, 2.

to heroin, as well as the "the raging dynamism of Ginsberg and his poem, *Howl*."[87] Rather, the magazine prioritized the "upper economic echelons of beat," the "cool cats" and "chicks" who have "money," "education," "good clothes" and "good jobs."[88] For such people, "coolness" was "relaxation, aloofness, indifference, languor," at least for the duration of the "swinging."[89] The magazine did not limit its depiction of the beats to affluent New Yorkers, as an article in the same issue on a soiree in San Francisco highlighted bohemians who were "the pure stuff, complete with sandals, paint-stained suntans, work shirt, beard and [a] clutched roll of manuscript paper."[90] Nonetheless, by featuring moneyed young professionals as archetypes of "cooldom," the magazine created one of the most socio-economically eclectic beat generations that appeared in the mass media.[91] Doing so enabled *Playboy* to link the "angry, roving youngsters" of Kerouac with its own readers, most of whom aspired not to the "pure stuff" of avant-garde literature but rather to "swinging" with other affluent "cool cats" and "chicks."

While newspapers and magazines often denounced the beatniks, and less frequently praised them, there was an underlying ambivalence in print media depictions

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[87]Sam Boal, "Cool Swinging in New York," *Playboy*, February 1958, 21, 26.

[88]Ibid., 21.

[89]Ibid., 26.

[90]Noel Clad, "A Frigid Frolic in Frisco," *Playboy*, February 1958, 22. The distinction was not regional, as the magazine presented a similarly upscale beat generation in Hollywood the following year; see Jim Morad, "The Coffee Houses [sic] of America," *Playboy*, July 1959, 95.

[91]Boal, "Cool Swinging," 21.

of the beat generation. Few publications exemplified this tendency more than *Life*, which exhibited both fascination and ambivalence in its assessment of postwar bohemians. While the magazine frequently denounced the beats, it also reported that they were "seldom ignoramuses–wild or not, theirs is a world of ideas."[92] Furthermore, *Life* concluded that the social and cultural significance of the beat generation surpassed that of previous avant-garde movements. Whereas "forerunners of Beatdom," such as the Dadaists, were "ignored by the general public," the beats "attracted wide public attention" and exerted "astonishing influence," from the "narrow and repetitive argot" that rapidly became "part of the American idiom" to the "fad for public recitation of verse" that gave "the very word, poetry, a new and abrasive connotation."[93] As "social rebels first and poets only second," the beats mounted a "curious rebellion–unplanned, unorganized and based on a thousand personal neuroses and a thousand conflicting egos," but "oddly effective withal."[94] Most important for *Life*, the beats served as the "voice of nonconformity, the fount of what might be described as a sort of nonpolitical radicalism" that renounced "virtually every aspect of current American society."[95] This message now rang out in "innumerable unlikely places," from cafes in large cities and bars in tiny

[92]Ibid., 130.

[93]Ibid., 116.

[94]Ibid., 126.

[95]Ibid., 126, 115.

beach communities to high schools and college towns throughout the country.[96] Yet *Life* was uncertain about the ultimate meaning and significance of the beats. The very title of its lengthiest and most famous expose on the subject, "The Only Rebellion Around," conveyed the ambivalence that so many magazines displayed toward the beat generation: *Life* seemed simultaneously to delight in reporting that at last some Americans chose to rebel loudly against the conformity of the Eisenhower years, yet to regret that the postwar cultural landscape produced such lackluster insurgents. Moreover, *Life* found it "disconcerting" that America, the "grandest casaba of all," could incubate such "improbable rebels," a "pervasive rag, tag, and bobtail of humanity" who actually preferred to be "ill-fed, ill-clothed and ill-housed."[97] Many people felt "spiritually stifled by present-day materialism" and grew "restive at the conformity which seems to be the price of security," yet the beats denounced these features of American society with an "exhibitionism that almost always moves the average man to uncertainty and embarrassment."[98] The beats seemed politically vacuous and artistically inept, yet they expressed pervasive discontents with a fierce intensity that resonated with many people. If *Life* doubted that beats could produce a lasting body of literature, it also believed that they captured the public imagination to an extent that dwarfed the attention garnered by previous generations of bohemians. Beneath its haughty disdain, *Life* hinted that the beat

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[96]Ibid., 126.

[97]Ibid., 115, 116.

[98]Ibid., 130.

generation had tapped into a deep undercurrent in American culture that might now be coming to the surface.

A similar ambivalence was evident in the film adaptation of the Jack Kerouac novel *The Subterraneans*.[99] Producer Arthur Freed was highly respected for screen musicals, including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *An American in Paris*, *Singin' in the Rain*, and his most recent film *Gigi* won nine Oscars, including best picture and best screenplay based on material from another medium.[100] While many producers sought merely to exploit or satirize the beat generation, Freed opined that "every period in history has had its revolutionary groups," but "right now, being this close to our current 'New Bohemians,' it's hard to evaluate their contributions to thought, art, and society."[101] His goal was " take an honest look at these young people who usually are on the receiving end of criticism and sarcasm."[102] In sharp contrast to the hackneyed stereotypes employed in other movies about the beats, *The Subterraneans* accords North Beach bohemians a substantial amount of legitimacy and seriousness. In the very first scene, as the camera

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[99]Patrick Mullins argues that this movie contradictorily seeks to neutralize the adversarial potential the beats and simultaneously portray subterraneans sympathetically, but his analysis often focuses on the extent to which the movie diverges from the novel. See "Hollywood and the Beats: MGM Does Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29 (Spring 2001): 32-41.

[100]Richard Shale, *Academy Awards: An Ungar Reference Index* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1978), 438-441.

[101]"MGM Looks at the World of Beatniks," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 June 1960, sec. 2, p. 4.

[102]Ibid.

pans across familiar landmarks of San Francisco, an opening message scrolls up the screen to establish that "in all times, in all cities, for good or for evil, the young Bohemians have been the makers of the future." Noting that "they are foolish and they have genius," this opening message validates the subterraneans, who may be idiosyncratic and erratic but are not fools, dilettantes or pawns.[103] Yet if bohemians are legitimate, bohemia itself is not. Although much of the plot unfolds in jazz clubs and bars populated with a wide array of unruly eccentrics, the central theme of *The Subterraneans* is that monogamy and a stable nuclear family cannot be achieved within the bohemian milieu. Like the novel, the movie focuses on the romance between Leo, a struggling writer, and Mardou, an emotionally volatile denizen of North Beach who recently ended one of many brief affairs. In the final scenes, Mardou hosts a soiree at her apartment and informs Leo that she is pregnant with his baby. She asks Leo if he is "ready for a family" and proclaims that "I want a man who's strong enough to be a father instead of a child." Yet she still loves him, and when he asks her to make the subterraneans leave, she complies. As the other bohemians take the party to the street, Leo promises to "grow up," Mardou waves a final goodbye to the revelers and the two embrace.[104] Thus the movie achieves narrative closure through the rejection of bohemia: the demand of Mardou for "a father instead of a child" overtly invokes conventional notions of male responsibility for wife and children, and the insistence of Leo that the subterraneans leave underscores the extent

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[103] *The Subterraneans*, VHS, dir. Ranald MacDougall, prod. Arthur Freed (MGM, 1960; copy in author's possession).

[104] Ibid.

to which both monogamy and a stable family are incompatible with bohemia. In order for Leo and Mardou to build a relationship and prepare for the birth of their child, they must extricate themselves from subterranean life.

Advertising Counterculture: California and Bohemian Public Space

Although the mass media often portrayed beats as lazy or dangerous, it also devoted substantial attention to some of the broader contours of postwar bohemianism as it appeared through the lens of the beat generation. One striking feature of mass-media depictions of the beats was the emphasis on San Francisco and Los Angeles as the most important cities for postwar bohemians. While New York was not excluded, the media almost always highlighted North Beach and Venice as the most important gathering places for the beats. In assessing such districts, the media explored the bars and coffeehouses where bohemians congregated. As with overall assessments of the beat generation, the media often relied on contradictory extremes to portray bohemian public space as either vibrant and stimulating or morose and sycophantic. Moreover, newspapers and magazines often used a voyeuristic framework to promote bohemian public space as arenas of tourism, in which visitors could vicariously participate in the countercultural milieu.[105]

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[105]Susan S. Fainstein and Dennis R. Judd argue that "Tourist spaces are designed to produce 'liminal moments' that lift the tourist above ordinary, everyday experience." Urban districts such as North Beach and Venice, as well as coffeehouses in Hollywood and on the Sunset Strip, were often portrayed by the mass media as precisely such sites of liminality, in which "bohemia" and "beat" signified the suspension of the "ordinary" and

It was not surprising that the mass media emphasized North Beach as a key gathering place for bohemians, because San Francisco was known since the later nineteenth century for hosting literary luminaries such as Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Bret Harte and Jack London, and also for being a "wide open town" that had tolerated nonconformity since the Gold Rush.[106] The San Francisco literary "renaissance" of the later 1950s was not limited to easterners like Ginsberg and Kerouac but included locals such as Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, as well as older poets and critics like Kenneth Rexroth.[107] Yet Los Angeles had a very different reputation, particularly among the intelligentsia of San Francisco and New York, as a sprawling cultural wasteland that

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the "everyday." See Fainstein and Judd, "Global Forces, Local Strategies, and Urban Tourism," in Judd and Fainstein, eds., *The Tourist City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 10. Similarly, film scholar David Sterritt argues that Hollywood movies about the beats portrayed coffeehouses as "sites of liminal activity" that existed "on the behavioral and ideological margin," where unconventional behavior was "harbored and protected" (*Mad to Be Saved*, 143). Sterritt's insight regarding movies can be applied to all mass media representations of coffeehouses and bars where beatniks congregated: the media found such public spaces to be useful in constructing the beat generation precisely because the conduct that occurred in such environments could be portrayed as subversive but did not need to be precisely defined. While in some cases the media was specific in positing certain behavior, such as same-sex attraction or racial intermixing, as a defining characteristic of bohemian public spaces, in many other instances such environments were depicted as "liminal" zones where many types of vaguely rebellious or unconventional activity occurred. Arguably, the fact that the precise character of such unconventionality was often unclear broadened the possible meanings and significations of "bohemia" and thus made it all the more alluring.

[106]Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Nancy J. Peters, *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), part 1.

[107]Warren French, *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, 1955-1960* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

produced only the inane drivel of Hollywood or the haunting noir fiction of writers like James M. Cain or Chester Himes, none of which indicated a vibrant cultural milieu.[108] Still, in the late 1950s, North Beach and Venice were the most widely publicized bohemias in America.

One reason for this was that California intellectuals used the mass media to promote San Francisco and Los Angeles as the new artistic and literary meccas of the nation. Early in 1957, Bay Area poet Michael Grieg wrote an article for *Mademoiselle* that praised not merely the creative ferment of the city but also the lack of pretension and competition among its intellectuals. Grieg emphasized that "San Francisco practices its arts in its own way–which is highly informal. There are few cliques or dogmas, with the result that a first-rank writer like Kenneth Rexroth, who lives in the area, is more apt to be admired than imitated; he stimulates rather than confines."[109] Similarly, the poet Michael McClure asserted that San Francisco was "too small to have the poetry coteries of New York. There isn't the same competitive spirit. There is more friendliness. The city is quieter and yet alive."[110] For Grieg, the growing number of intellectuals moving to the Bay Area meant that "San Francisco, by the simple process of spontaneous

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[108]Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 17-20; David Fine, ed., *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Essays* (1984, revised ed., Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

[109]Michael Grieg, "The Lively Arts in San Francisco," *Mademoiselle*, February 1957, 142, 190.

[110]Ibid., 142.

combustion, is rapidly becoming one of the liveliest artistic centers in America."[111] Thus many intellectuals believed that San Francisco had the creative ferment of New York but lacked its cliquish competitiveness. As depicted here, San Francisco offered the best of all worlds: tight knit circles of artists and writers whose goal was not to get exhibited at the finest galleries or published by the most reputable presses but rather to exchange ideas in a stimulating intellectual environment. Yet the milieu of San Francisco was not merely the product of resident boosters. When Ginsberg and fellow poet Gregory Corso returned to New York after the debut of "Howl" in San Francisco, they too praised the Bay Area over Gotham. In an interview with the *Village Voice*, Ginsberg proclaimed that "we had to leave the Village to find fulfillment and recognition," while Corso opined that "There is no room for youth and vitality in New York."[112] Even though Ginsberg lived much of his life in Manhattan, he believed that the Bay Area catalyzed artistic and literary creativity. Moreover, the assertion that New York was inhospitable to "youth and vitality" suggested that San Francisco stimulated youthful rebellion in a way that the Big Apple did not.

Although San Francisco had an established reputation as a bohemian city, Los Angeles did not, and no writer did more to change that than Lawrence Lipton, who was largely responsible for putting Venice on the countercultural map of America. A Polish immigrant born around the turn of the century, Lipton worked as publicity director for the

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[111]Ibid.

[112]*Journals Mid-Fifties: 1954-1958*, by Allen Ginsberg, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 177.

Fox Theatre chain, wrote advertising copy in New York, and then moved to Chicago and in the 1930s immersed himself in the bohemian milieu of the Near North Side area, befriending Kenneth Rexroth and mingling with political radicals, avant-garde intellectuals and free love communards.[113] Moving to Los Angeles, Lipton co-wrote popular mystery novels with his wife Craig Rice and scripts for radio dramas and television shows, but in the early 1950s he decided to focus on poetry and write potboilers only to survive financially.[114] By the mid 1950s, Lipton fancied himself the mentor of a small circle of poets and painters in Venice, whom he believed had real talent and potential. When the beat generation started making headlines in 1958, he swung into action and churned out *The Holy Barbarians* the following summer, intending to promote the rundown district at the western edge of Los Angeles as the headquarters of the latest and greatest avant-garde in America. In many ways he was uniquely suited to the task: a veteran of urban bohemias who was genuinely interested in cultivating young creative talent in Venice, he also knew how to manipulate every ounce of publicity for the task at hand. His book was an instant best-seller and led both to growing publicity for the bohemian colony of Venice and an influx of new residents, frequent visitors, and

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[113]John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 23; Lawrence Lipton Oral History Transcript, interviewed in 1962 by Donald Schippers, Series 507, Partially Completed Transcripts and Audio Tapes, p. 215-16, 506, Oral History Program, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter cited as DSC/UCLA).

[114]Maynard, *Venice West*, 23, 36-37.

tourists.[115] Lipton did not content himself with the book but gave interviews for CBS radio, the Jack Paar Show, and lectured throughout Los Angeles on the cultural significance of the beat generation.[116]

In *The Holy Barbarians*, Lipton exploited Venice bohemians yet simultaneously insisted that they were talented artists and writers as well as genuine cultural rebels. On one level the book was a how-to guide for would-be bohemians, including a glossary of hipster slang and profiles of Venice habitues. Lipton conducted extensive interviews with Venice residents and often created two characterizations for each real-life person he spoke with, in order to exaggerate the size of the bohemian colony he celebrated.[117] He also included a "Picture Essay" with photographs of well-known California writers who did not even live in Venice, such as Henry Miller, Kenneth Rexroth, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, in an effort to link the emerging scene in L.A. with its more established Bay Area counterpart. Yet Lipton also tried to present a serious sociological investigation of the beats, including lengthy transcripts of conversations and long chapters that

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[115]On the influx of new residents and frequent visitors into Venice, see chap. 2 of this dissertation.

[116]"The Beatniks," hosted by Sydney Omarr, CBS Radio Network, 1959, Lawrence Lipton Tape no. 453, American Literature Collection, Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections, University of Southern California (hereafter cited as ALC/USC). Lipton also lectured at universities and on local radio programs throughout L.A. during the summer and fall of 1959; see Lipton Tapes, nos. 107, 137 and 160, ALC/USC. His appearance on the Jack Paar Show is briefly mentioned in Maynard, *Venice West*, 109.

[117]Maynard, *Venice West*, 82-83, 98-99. Shortly after publication, Lipton occasionally mentioned modeling "characters" in the book on real people in Venice; see Lipton Tapes, nos. 792, 839 and 853, ALC/USC.

distinguished the bohemians of the late 1950s with their prewar counterparts and explained why the beats rejected contemporary society. For Lipton, the beats were "holy in their search of Self, barbarian in their total rejection of the so-called 'civilized' standards of success," and he portrayed his subjects as the agents of a seismic shift in postwar culture: "When the barbarians appear on the frontiers of a civilization it is a sign of a crisis in that civilization. If the barbarians come, not with weapons of war but songs and ikons of peace, it is a sign that the crisis is one of a spiritual nature."[118] This "spiritual" crisis centered on the need to go "outside the churches, for signs of an American mythos, a mass ritual," and many beats believed that listening to jazz, smoking marijuana and having sex each constituted a "ritual act" that functioned as a "unifying principle in human relationships" by restoring a sense of "awareness and immediacy."[119] Economically, the holy barbarians sought a "viable, voluntary, independent poverty" that enabled them to "make out with a minimum of income."[120] For Lipton, this voluntary poverty was significant, because "In a society geared to the production of murderous hardware and commodities with built-in obsolescence for minimum use at maximum prices on an artificially stimulated mass consumption basis, poverty by choice is subversive."[121] While many Americans were aware of the "shucks" of militarism and

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[118]Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), inside front dust jacket, first page of unnumbered preface.

[119]Ibid., 164, 158, 171.

[120]Ibid., 54.

[121]Ibid., 309.

consumerism, "The difference between the beatnik and the square is that the beatnik acts on his knowledge and tries to avoid the avoidable contagions."[122] Overall, the widely varying emphases of this book failed to cohere into a succinct whole. To a large extent, it was a primer for anyone who wanted to purchase countercultural chic, informing readers about the clothes, lingo, and musical tastes they needed in order to join the beat generation. Yet *The Holy Barbarians* was also a powerful indictment of postwar society and an impassioned defense of those who sought viable alternatives in their daily lives.

One unambiguous point of *The Holy Barbarians* was that Venice was at the forefront of countercultural life in America, and its appearance coincided with a plethora of mass-media coverage of the beats that singled out Los Angeles and San Francisco as the most important cities for postwar bohemians. The movie *The Beat Generation* is set in L.A., where beatniks divide their time between Venice and a coffeehouse on the Sunset Strip. Early in the film a beat woman says, "I wish I never had to go back east."[123] She does not elaborate, but one implication is that the bohemians in this movie regard the West Coast as the home of the beat generation, and that there is nothing "back east" that appeals to them. The print media were much more overt in emphasizing California. *Life* asserted that the beats had "steered American bohemianism toward the West," and that "San Francisco's North Beach section, because of its long tradition of bohemianism and because of its memories of early Beats, must still be considered the capital of

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[122]Ibid., 308.

[123]*The Beat Generation*, 1959, dir. Charles Haas.

Beatdom."[124] Similarly, *Time* called San Francisco "the holy city of hip," while the *Los Angeles Mirror News* claimed that North Beach was "The Capital of the World for the Beat Generation."[125] Furthermore, newspapers and magazines often presented California bohemias as grittier versions of their eastern counterparts. The *Los Angeles Times* contrasted the "smoky, dirty dives in Greenwich Village" with the "even smokier, dirtier dives in San Francisco and Los Angeles."[126] Similarly, *Time* reported that "those unwashed minstrels of the West" now abandoned the "incipient squareness" of North Beach in favor of the "shabby little Los Angeles beach community" of Venice, which *Life* called the "seedy capital of the bearded bohemians called beatniks."[127] While the mass media did not ignore New York or the Village entirely, newspaper, magazines and movies often portrayed the beat generation as a new incarnation of bohemia that preferred the rundown enclaves of San Francisco and Los Angeles over the presumably more cosmopolitan and sophisticated environs of New York. Indeed, the two most important locales for the beat generation appeared to be North Beach and Venice, and when the former seemed too conventional, the beats traveled not to the Village but rather to southern California.

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[124]O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 119, 129.

[125]"The New Pictures," *Time*, 20 June 1960, 64; Laro, 'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1 p. 3.

[126]Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," 5;

[127]"Bang Bong Bing," 80; "Bam; Roll on with Bam!" *Time*, 14 September 1959, 28; "Squaresville U.S.A. vs. Beatsville," *Life*, 21 September 1959, 31.

Another key feature of mass-media representations of the beat generation was the portrayal of bars and coffeehouses where bohemians congregated as multifaceted environments in which behavior ranged from stimulating conversation and vibrant intellectual exchange to sexual conquest and bitterly cliquish infighting. Yet the media nearly always portrayed bars and coffeehouses as places in which predominantly middle-class people could renounce or at least momentarily ignore many of the restrictive features of bourgeois culture. Of course, praising coffeehouses as unique and stimulating environments was a very old story. Since the eighteenth century, western European intellectuals had contrasted the "vile, obscene talk" and "rude rabble" of ale houses, where alcohol made apprentices and clerks "unfit for business," with coffeehouses, whose patrons exhibited the "greater sobriety" of their "wakeful and civil drink" and where, as Montesquieu observed, "people of all classes" discussed "extravagant plans, utopian dreams and political plots."[128] By the mid-twentieth century, the mass media in America portrayed bohemian bars and coffeehouses as places where middle-class people gathered, but now habitues sought to distance themselves not from lower-class miscreants but rather from bourgeois culture, symbolized in the postwar decades by suburban monotony, gray flannel suits and organization men. As with eighteenth-century pamphleteers, the mass media of the postwar decades continued to portray coffeehouses as zones of differentiation, but now bars were also included and the defining feature was not sober

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[128]Qtd. in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 94, 97, 95.

business acumen, but rather bohemian unconventionality as it appeared through the lens of the beat generation.

Newspapers in Los Angeles and San Francisco often adopted the role of bohemian boosters, advertising certain bars and cafes as variegated environments where people gathered for poetry readings, jazz music and vibrant intellectual exchange. The *Examiner* noted that the audience at a jazz and poetry performance at The Cellar in North Beach included "the usual beards, goatees, optical spectacles and sartorial spectacles."[129] Similarly, the *San Francisco Examiner* found the Place, another North Beach bar, to be "self-consciously shabby but comfortably relaxed" and "filled with young people deep in talk," while the *San Francisco Chronicle* called it a "haven for the misunderstood and the inquisitive."[130] Similarly, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* reported that inside an L.A. coffeehouse, beats confined themselves to "listening to jazz or poetry" and engaging in "intellectual conversation," and on one occasion when poets and jazz musicians performed together, most of the audience sat "motionless with deadpan concentration."[131] The *Mirror News* reported that the Cosmo Alley in Hollywood featured "jazz poetry"

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[129]Luther Nichols, "Poetry with a Jazz Beat," *San Francisco Examiner*, 2 April 1957, no sec., n. p., "Ferlinghetti, Lawrence, poet; 1957 only" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[130]Dick Nolan, "The City," *San Francisco Examiner*, 22 April 1958, no sec., n. p., "Cafes" envelope; "Jay Tries to Beat the Rap," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 May 1958. no sec., n. p. "Hoppe, Jay, Coexistence Bagel Shoppe, 1398 Grant St." envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[131]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4; Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1, p. 3;

along with the "off-beat" and "iconoclastic" humor of sick comedians such as Mort Sahl.[132] These accounts highlighted the countercultural potential of bohemian public space, emphasizing that bars and coffeehouses provided not only poetry readings and jazz performances but also an alternative atmosphere that validated eccentricity and diversity. In contrast to negative stereotypes and caricatures, here newspapers promoted countercultural spaces as arenas in which ideas could be voiced, individuality could be expressed and superficial appearances could be put on prominent display or forgotten entirely.

The promotion of bohemianism did not stop at general descriptions but also included specific information about the best venues for countercultural tourists. For readers who wanted to explore bohemia but were not sure where to go, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* provided the addresses of 33 coffeehouses (and few nightclubs) in the greater L.A. metropolitan area. In some cases the *Mirror News* commented on the atmosphere and the clientele inside particular hangouts: "Zodiac, 4308 Melrose Ave.: Neighborhood gathering place. A special section where one can sprawl [on] Japanese fashion pillows at low tables."[133] The paper noted that one establishment had a "membership gimmick" and specified that some catered to the "Hollywood crowd" while others included "Mostly college types," and another was "predominately Negro."[134]

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[132]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

[133]Frank Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks from L.A. Coffee Houses," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 2 June 1959, sec. 2, p. 8.

[134]Ibid.

Ironically, such detailed descriptions appeared in an article about the unfortunate influx of tourists in L.A. coffeehouses, and thus the *Mirror News* simultaneously lamented the fact that affluent consumers chased beats from their favorite hangouts but also publicized information that helped readers exacerbate this very process. In the guise of a report on the beat generation, the paper advertised countercultural chic, from upscale establishments in Malibu to far more modest venues in Hermosa Beach.

While many newspapers included a wide assortment of bars and cafes under the rubric of "beat hangout," few publications were more ecumenical than *Playboy*, which endorsed the countercultural authenticity of a both upscale and back alley venues. The "rallying place of beat intellectuals" typically included "shabby hideouts with cracked walls and carefully nurtured cobwebs," places that attracted "bearded boys and lipstickless girls" who engaged in "earnest, unsmiling talk about poetry and politics and the meaning of life."[135] In these coffeehouses a "broke bohemian" could sip one cup of espresso "all evening with nary a prod from the waitress."[136] At the Insomniac, located a few miles south of Venice in Hermosa Beach, poets paid "oral homage" to "Howl," which they regarded as the "magnum opus" of Ginsberg.[137] Yet *Playboy* also included posh establishments within the same milieu. In these coffeehouses, with their "lush, luxurious" atmosphere, "glittering crystal chandeliers, deep-pile carpeting, and walls

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[135]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 43.

[136]Ibid.

[137]"The Sound of Beat," *Playboy*, July 1959, 44.

filled with good, sometimes valuable, paintings," the "beat atmosphere" prevailed but was "all tongue-in-chic," and the "talk is livelier, if shallower" than in less expensive hangouts.[138] Here, nursing a cup for hours elicited "frowns from the management."[139] Yet *Playboy* indicated that permeable boundaries existed between these two types, as many establishments attracted an eclectic clientele. Every weekend in Greenwich Village, the "self-defeating popularity" of the crowded Rienzi forced the management to "discourage everything except very rapid coffee drinking," but during the week locals met for "sketching, reading and unconventional conversation."[140] In L.A., the magazine recommended Cosmo Alley as an excellent place for "hopeful male and female starlets who yearn to crash films," but also noted that comedian Lenny Bruce held forth here as "court jester in the kingdom of the sick," engaging audiences with his incisive humor.[141] The effort of *Playboy* to give trendy, upscale coffeehouses the imprimatur of countercultural authenticity indicated that the magazine, like the *Los Angeles Mirror News*, participated in as well as reported on the commercialization of bohemia. For *Playboy*, virtually any coffeehouse where paintings hung on the walls or people talked about poetry was bohemian.

Newspapers and magazines also emphasized that a broad range of people

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[138]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 95.

[139]Ibid.

[140]"Sound of Beat," 44.

[141]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 95; "Sound of Beat," 44.

frequented bohemian public spaces. The *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* described the audience at a Ferlinghetti reading in the Coffee Gallery as "a stunning mixture of types" that ranged from "Madison ave. [sic] to Grant ave.," a popular thoroughfare in North Beach, and from "employed to unemployed, bearded to clean-shaven, girls to boys."[142] Similarly, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* reported that coffeehouses "attract all types of people, including members of the beat generation and those on its outer fringes," including "thousands of students, teen-agers, nightowls who drift in after the bars close" and "the movie colony."[143] Furthermore, the *San Francisco Chronicle* opined that newcomers to North Beach included both frequent visitors and occasional tourists. The *Chronicle* noted that "Week-End Bohemians" were people who "have driven in from their tract home to find out what the Beat has to offer."[144] Yet the paper observed that unlike weekend bohemians, the typical tourist "has no desire to conform to the nonconformity" but wanted merely to gaze at the odd personalities in the district.[145] This distinction implied that frequent visitors felt an affinity for the alternative attitudes and practices of bohemians, while occasional tourists came merely to gawk at an entertaining form of exoticism. Moreover, the *Chronicle* suggested that there was a constant flow of

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[142]William Steif, "Hip-Hop Hoooray for Hip Poet," *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*, 2 December 1959, no sec., n. p., "Ferlinghetti, Lawrence; poet, City Lights Books, 1958-1967" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[143]Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks," sec. 2, p. 8; Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

[144]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 15 June 1958, 5.

[145]Ibid., 22 June 1958, 6.

visitors in bohemian districts, ranging from those who wanted to blend in to those who merely gawked at their surroundings. Although the *Chronicle* did not elaborate on the allure of bohemian public space for individuals who did not identify as writers or artists, it implied that such an attraction existed and that it drew people to North Beach on a regular basis. In depicting the appeal of coffeehouses, newspapers strongly suggested that one did not have to be beat to enjoy bohemia.

In contrast to newspapers and magazines, movies presented a much more negative view of the coffeehouses where beats congregated, portraying them either as zones of paralysis in which sullen beatniks stared at one another or fiercely competitive arenas in which would-be intellects jockeyed for adulation. As previously noted, coffeehouse denizens in *The Beat Generation* are lackadaisical and withdrawn to the point of being comatose.[146] In contrast, *A Bucket of Blood* depicts beat coffeehouses as intensely competitive arenas in which a handful of poets and painters, their sycophantic hangers-on, and a wide array of moochers jostle for prestige and the occasional drug connection. Many of the habitues of the Yellow Door coffeehouse are insufferably pretentious and elitist poseurs who imagine themselves part of a tiny minority of sophisticates. The movie opens with a poet named Maxwell solemnly proclaiming that "I will talk to you of art, for there is nothing else." While Maxwell regards the coffeehouse as a forum for his lofty pronouncements, its owner Leonard focuses on how much money he can make, and when Walter, a busboy at the café, creates a sculpture that wins immediate praise from

[146]*The Beat Generation*, 1959, dir. Charles Haas.

Yellow Door denizens, Leonard tells him to take the night off, because "when people applaud they don't order coffee." Similarly, two of the coffeehouse regulars are inveterate cadgers who "make the scene" with Walter only after he sports fancy new clothes. Finally, a bleach-blonde model tells Walter that "you're just a simple little farm boy and the rest of us are all sophisticated beatniks." Significantly, this invocation of the beats brings sneers and derision from the other bohemians, who regard this woman as a "benighted" pretender. Thus the movie simultaneously exploits and condemns the beat generation by distinguishing between genuine avant-garde intellectuals and camp followers who lack any semblance of talent for or appreciation of art. Moreover, most of the characters in *A Bucket of Blood* regard the coffeehouse as an environment in which to satisfy their own wants and needs, with little genuine concern for anyone else, even the people sitting right next to them (none of the coffeehouse habitues notice that one of their number vanishes each time Walter kills one of them to produce a new sculpture). In contrast, Walter knows "what it's like to be ignored," and his initial motivation as a sculptor is not to filch off other people or pontificate about art but simply to gain respect.[147] Yet the bohemian milieu Walter occupies is so hypercritical, superficial and vindictive that mere respect is not possible: one must either develop an elaborate facade with which to dazzle sycophants or endure the scene from the sidelines. Walter can do neither for very long, and thus he cannot survive.

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[147]Ibid.

Homosexuals, Women, and African Americans in Media Depictions of the Beats

Portrayals of African Americans, homosexuals and women in media representations of the beat generation varied substantially in terms of both frequency and tone. While women garnered extensive exposure, movies and especially television devoted much less attention to racial intermixing and homosexuality, which obviously reflected the controversial character of such topics. Despite such differences, the mass media continued to utilize contradictory binaries to depict minorities in bohemia. Bohemian women were often portrayed as thoroughly subordinate to their male counterparts, yet the media also suggested that some women attained significant autonomy in the urban countercultures of L.A. and San Francisco. The media was particularly dichotomous in its treatment of homosexuality and racial intermixing, which were either ignored entirely or presented as unique instances of the acceptance of diversity. Here too, the media adopted a voyeuristic framework to promote bohemian districts as zones of countercultural tourism, hinting that African Americans, women and homosexuals could avail themselves of freedoms that were less abundant in other parts of the urban landscape.

Movies occasionally alluded to the presence of homosexuals in bohemia. In *The Subterraneans*, one male writer is dandyish and effeminate, but such stereotypical manifestations of homosexuality by this character are the only clues that the movie

provides regarding the presence of gays and lesbians in North Beach.[148] In contrast, *The Beat Generation* offers less overt but more intriguing hints about gay male bohemians. The main beatnik character is a serial rapist who exhibits little concern in the romantic advances of women, and his relationship with another man has subtle undertones of same-sex desire. In one scene he attempts to convince a male friend to commit rape, looking at him intently and telling him hesitantly that "Tomorrow it'll be you and me instead of, instead of just me."[149] While the obvious meaning of this comment is that his friend will now join him in a sadistic crime spree, this psychopathic misogynist insists that his friend rape a woman but equivocates regarding the significance of such an act, insinuating a bond that goes beyond camaraderie in crime. His friend says nothing in response and in another scene passionately kisses a woman, which strongly suggests that he is heterosexual. This is the only hint of same-sex attraction, yet this movie presents the beat generation as thoroughly dysfunctional and posits the instability of heterosexual marriage as the catalyst of beatnik rebellion, which at least opens the possibility that the rapist not only harbors an intense hatred for women but is also homosexual.

In contrast to such vagueness, the print media often noted the presence of homosexuals in the beat generation, although newspapers and magazines differed substantially in assessing the relationship between homosexuality and bohemianism. *Time* briefly noted "ambisextrous" characters in a review of Kerouac's *The*

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[148] *The Subterraneans*, 1960, dir. Ranald MacDougall.

[149] *The Beat Generation*, 1959, dir. Charles Haas.

Subterraneans, a veiled reference to bisexuals, but did not elaborate on their presence in either beat literature or bohemian enclaves.[150] *Life*, one of few mass-circulation magazines to dwell at any length on homosexuality among the beats, asserted that "Few Beats are homosexual, although they tend to regard homosexuality with vast forbearance."[151] However, the magazine found it more significant that "Howl" reflected "Ginsberg's public and repeated boasts that he is a homosexual."[152] For *Life*, public affirmations of homosexuality merely constituted one more example of the crass showmanship of Ginsberg and other beat celebrities. More ominously, the *Los Angeles Times* insinuated that homosexual beats were perverted criminals. Beneath the "semi-intellectual" surface of the beat generation lurked "a more sordid picture of dope addicts, minor criminals and neurotics."[153] The "order of the day for the true Beatnik" consisted of "experiments with every social taboo, including narcotics, crime and perversion."[154] The *Times* did not elaborate on these experiments, but during the 1950s the term "perversion" often denoted homosexuality, and images of "dope addicts, minor criminals and neurotics" obsessed with "narcotics, crime and perversion" suggested that homosexuality was merely one characteristic of a beat generation that not only

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[150]"Blazing & the Beat," 104.

[151]O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 129.

[152]Ibid., 120.

[153]Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," 33.

[154]Ibid., 5.

disregarded sexual taboos but engaged in depraved and immoral acts.[155] Although the *Times* implied a link between criminals, homosexuals and bohemians, its brief allusions to sexual mores among beats were sensational but ultimately ambiguous. Similarly, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* emphasized that beatniks regarded sex as a very private matter but also suggested that homophobia existed among some bohemians. The paper observed that "sex for the 'beat' isn't something you talk about; it is something you do," and noted that "how you do it is your own business and no one may ask."[156] Furthermore, the paper concluded that "there seems to be something definitely asexual in their demeanor and their lives."[157] Moreover, while there was "no evidence of overt homosexuality," "sexual deviates" were among those whom beats "look tolerantly upon."[158] Yet despite such tolerance, when some coffeehouses were "taken over by the 'camping' Hollywood crowd," the "'beat' moves on elsewhere."[159] Thus the *Mirror News* presented a contradictory picture of homosexuality among the beats: they regarded sex as a matter of individual discretion that need not be publicized and seemed tolerant of same-sex

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[155]On the use of "perverts" to denote homosexuals during the 1950s, see John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 59-60.

[156]Laro, "Beat Generation Asks Dedication," sec. 1, p. 3.

[157]Laro, "'Beat Generation' Burning Issue," sec. 1, p. 3.

[158]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4; Laro, "'Beat' Crowd Crowded," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 3 June 1959, sec. 3, p. 5.

[159]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

attraction, yet when confronted with the overt homosexuality of effeminate gay men, some beats decided they needed a new hangout. Did beats in L.A. regard all aspects of sexuality as private and thus disdain any overt display of sexual orientation and attraction? Or did their "asexual" forbearance stop short of fully accepting homosexuality as one component of the bohemian milieu? The paper did not say.

San Francisco newspapers were much more direct in noting the prevalence of homosexuals in the beat generation. One reason for this was the differing homosexual geographies of Los Angeles and San Francisco in the late 1950s. L.A. had no dominant homosexual district, as gay clubs were scattered throughout the city in areas such as Hollywood, Silver Lake, and Venice.[160] In contrast, North Beach hosted one of the largest concentrations of gay and lesbian bars in the Bay Area, and clubs featuring performances by male and female impersonators had lured tourists to the district since the 1930s.[161] North Beach had larger numbers of both avant-garde intellectuals and homosexuals than Venice or any other single area of L.A., and thus San Francisco journalists were far more likely to notice and comment upon the presence of homosexuals in the district. Indeed, San Francisco newspapers often portrayed homosexuality as a key component of the bohemian milieu. At a Halloween party at the Black Cat, where both avant-garde intellectuals and homosexuals congregated, the *Examiner* observed "a burly

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[160]Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 23, 38, 45.

[161]Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, chaps. 1 and 2.

gent, complete with tattooed arms, swishing around in an elegant peau de soie cocktail dress mit stole," and "a guy wearing dangle earrings, a black leather motorcycle jacket, hip-length black stockings and pumps."[162] While Halloween may have encouraged cross-dressing men to be more ostentatious, the *Examiner* took their general presence at the Black Cat for granted. Similarly, the *Chronicle* suggested that gay men were so ubiquitous in bohemian bars and restaurants that outside observers might not notice them. A person could enter "the leather-padded, swinging doors of a restaurant-bar just off Grant Avenue," see "dozens of young men" eating dinner, and "stay for hours without realizing this is the hard core of a Beat Generation group that practices its own peculiar protest against the conforming American ideal of home and family: Homosexuality."[163] The *Chronicle* depicted bohemian sexuality as "having sex as often and in as many ways" as possible, including "picking up homosexuals in gay bars," and noted that many homosexuals came to North Beach on the weekends to "find conformity for their nonconformity."[164] These portrayals of gay life in North Beach suggested that bohemians accepted gender transgression and homosexuality, that homosexuals could both stand out from and blend into the bohemian crowd, and that many homosexuals frequented North Beach precisely because the area validated the presence of gay people. Moreover, these depictions of homosexuality among the beat generation contained a deep undercurrent of

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[162]Nolan, "The City," *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 November 1957, no sec., n p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[163]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 15 June 1958, 4.

[164]Ibid., and 22 June 1958, 6.

sex tourism: San Francisco newspapers presented North Beach as a district in which unconventional behavior included same-sex attraction and cross dressing.[165] Thus newspapers simultaneously provided readers with voyeuristic accounts of bohemianism and homosexuality but also identified specific bars in which gender-inappropriate behavior flourished.

In reporting on the beats, San Francisco newspapers devoted much more coverage to homosexuals than to African Americans or racial intermixing, although the *Chronicle* noted the prevalence of interracial romantic relationships. The paper reported that "Some Beatniks are satisfied only by inter-racial love-making," and inside the Place it observed that "A handsome young Negro, elegantly dressed in an expensive Ivy League suit, is sipping beer at the small bar. His fancy clothes were bought and paid for by the white girl who is keeping him in North Beach. But he doesn't tell you about it."[166] This instance stands out as one of the few occasions when a newspaper found someone unwilling to talk, suggesting that the oft-derided tendency of beatniks to pontificate endlessly masked certain aspects of bohemian life from the view of casual observers. Nor were San Francisco reporters typically at a loss for words in their descriptions of beat attitudes and behavior, yet the paucity of comments from the *Chronicle*, and the virtual silence of other San Francisco newspapers on the issue of race relations in the beat

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[165]On sex tourism as it relates to homosexuality and urban public space, see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 52-56, 76-81.

[166]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 4 and 15 June 1958, 4.

generation, indicated a singular reluctance to delve too deeply into this particular facet of bohemian life. At a time when interracial marriage was still illegal in many states, the *Chronicle* evidently found the subject too controversial to dwell upon at length.[167] Instead, as with accounts of homosexuality, the *Chronicle* utilized a titillating framework to note that some beats attained sexual satisfaction only through interracial relationships and to hint at such unions between African American men and affluent white women. Yet the paper said little else and thus enabled readers to use their imaginations regarding the sexual component of racial intermixing among bohemians. If the *Chronicle* was unwilling to assess interracial sexual relationships at length, it seemed eager to encourage its readers to do so.

In contrast to such calculated vagueness, Los Angeles newspapers either ignored African American bohemians entirely or insisted that the beat generation attained complete racial integration. When the *Times* ran a feature story on the beat generation, it noted very briefly that whites idolized Charlie Parker and that "there's a close resemblance between the Beats' language and the language used by jazz musicians," but the article made no other allusions to racial intermixing among bohemians.[168] At the other extreme, the *Mirror News* concluded that the beats created an environment of

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[167]When this series was reprinted four years later, the material quoted in this paragraph was eliminated. See "The Beatniks," in William Hogan and William German, eds., *The San Francisco Chronicle Reader* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 40, 46. One of the people Brown interviewed had much to say on this subject; see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[168]Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," 33.

interracial harmony. The "social life" of Venice beatniks "represents what is probably the only truly racially integrated life in the United States, devoid of sham and self-consciousness."[169] Furthermore, "the Beat Generation knows no racial barriers; it accepts the abjectly poor and the social outcast."[170] This linkage of racial intermixing with both the assumed absence of superficiality and the acceptance of impoverished and marginalized individuals suggested that white beats regarded African Americans as part of a larger segment of ostracized people, and that the pursuit of authenticity by white bohemians either facilitated or necessitated the inclusion of such groups in the beat milieu. The *Mirror News* insinuated that African Americans had no intrinsic place among the beats beyond their embodiment of the universally disfranchised, people whom white bohemians, in their voluntary renunciation of middle-class economic privilege, identified as inhabitants of their own peripheral social position. Moreover, in describing beatniks at an unspecified coffeehouse, the *Mirror News* noted that "the crowd is black and white, for the Negro is completely integrated, socially and sexually."[171] This hinted that African Americans functioned as sexually charged and exotic figures who personified the fantasies of white bohemians regarding the virile potency of blacks. Furthermore, by connecting racial intermixing inside coffeehouses with interracial sex, the paper implied that racial commingling among bohemians had as much to do with

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[169]Laro, "Beat Generation: New Look," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 1 June 1959, sec. 1, p. 2.

[170]Laro, "Beat Generation Asks Dedication," sec. 1, p. 3.

[171]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

private sexual relationships as with the integration of public space, and that the acceptance of African Americans in bohemia depended at least partially on their willingness or desire to have sex with whites. Thus the *Mirror News* deployed titillating hints about interracial sex and hyperbolic claims of harmonious racial integration, but provided little substantive reportage on race relations among bohemians.

Although it eschewed the subject of interracial sex, *Life* concluded that racial intermixing among the beats was an insignificant component of the infatuation of white bohemians with all social outcasts. *Life* acknowledged that "the Negro, it is true, is a hero to the Beat," but the magazine insisted that the typical white beatnik "treasures and envies" the "irresponsibility, cheerful promiscuity and subterranean defiance" that "years of bondage" instilled in African Americans.[172] For such white people, a "middle-class Negro would be hopelessly square."[173] White beatniks yearned most fervently for the "roach-guarded mores of the skid road, the flophouse, the hobo jungle and the slum," and thus created a "cult of the Pariah" that "only by coincidence" included African Americans.[174] Finally, *Life* opined that it was "doubtful that antisegregationists or many Negroes could take comfort" in the beats.[175] The magazine concluded that white bohemians might romanticize the experience of working-class blacks or idolize a few jazz

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[172]O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 115.

[173]Ibid.

[174]Ibid.

[175]Ibid.

musicians, but this did little to improve race relations or benefit African Americans. In the context of a resurgent civil rights movement, white bohemians who valorized certain segments of the African American population struck *Life* as hopelessly naive.[176]

Movies were much more guarded in their portrayal of racial intermixing among bohemians. The only African American with a speaking role in *The Beat Generation* is none other than Louis Armstrong, who rebukes the beats and implicitly critiques white bohemians who exoticize African American culture. In the opening scene, Armstrong sings before a predominantly white audience inside a coffeehouse, telling them that "you think you live as you chose" but "I think you headed for the blues." He admonishes the beats that "you're lives don't have a meaning, though you're livin' up a storm, you do anything at all except conform / You don't have much ambition, and [you are] aimless and depressed / You think you really with it, but you're missing all the best."[177] Many beat writers venerated jazz musicians, yet the fact that one of the greatest jazz performers in American history denounces the beat generation implies a critique of white appropriations of African American culture: Armstrong does not address racial issues directly, but he clearly positions himself against the beats by rebuking their vacuous

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[176]*Life* tended to depict racism and civil rights agitation in the late 1950s through a framework of domesticity and the family, often portraying African Americans who struggle against racism at the local level within a context of strengthening nuclear family bonds, a goal that white as well as black readers could presumably identify with regardless of racial divisions. Regarding the civil rights movement itself, the magazine emphasized a gradualist approach that fit within white perceptions of liberal reform. See Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 143-156.

[177]*The Beat Generation*, 1959, dir. Charles Haas.

rebellion. Armstrong may perform in a beatnik café, but he expresses contempt for his audience and is in but not of the bohemia portrayed in this movie. His performance denies the possibility that black jazz musicians and white bohemians share any fundamental affinities or concerns.

In the film adaptation of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*, African Americans occupy a thoroughly subordinate position. The protagonist of the novel pursues a romantic relationship with a woman of mixed African American and American Indian descent, but in the movie this character is transformed into a white woman born in France. At a time when interracial marriage was still illegal in much of the nation, a sexual relationship between a black man and a white woman was evidently too much for Hollywood to risk.[178] As in *The Beat Generation*, African Americans usually appear in *The Subterraneans* while performing on stage, most notably when Carmen McRae sings

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[178]*The Subterraneans*, 1960, dir. Ranald MacDougall. When Freed acquired the film rights in the summer of 1958, *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen reported that "a major movie is in the works, with Vincente Minelli directing and Duke Ellington (they hope) writing the music"(Caen, "Friday Fish-Fry," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 13). Yet when the film went into production a year later, not only were Minelli and Ellington absent, but Freed fired the brothers Denis and Terry Sanders from their respective positions as director and associate producer, and scrapped two weeks of film shot under their supervision. The Sanders claimed that, in addition to not receiving the promised two weeks rehearsal time, Freed wanted Mardou, the lead female character, to be a "gentle waif," while the brothers believed she should be "desperate, anguished, frigid" ("Row Over Beatnik Film," *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*, 10 September 1959, no sec., n. p., Kerouac, Jack Biographical File [Vertical], SFHC). The personality of Mardou aside, *Film Quarterly* speculated that the studio fired the Sanders brothers because "they planned to do the Kerouac story relatively straight," meaning "the girl is supposed to be Negro" ("Entertainments," *Film Quarterly* 14 [Fall 1960]: 62).

an innocuous tune about "a little coffeehouse I know / Where all the new bohemians go," while a predominantly white audience listens intently as the lead white characters beam at each other and draw far more camera time than McRae. Later, several white people paint a large canvass, and then a black man turns out the lights and holds a spotlight on a white woman while she dances. An unmistakable implication here is that African Americans occupy a menial position among bohemians, literally working the lights while white people dance. In another scene, as a spotlight moves throughout a bar and forces anyone illuminated to divulge their innermost secrets to all in attendance, this same black man sits silently next to a white person who addresses the crowd.[179] Here, an African American interacts with whites only as a spectator. Overall, black characters appear in *The Subterraneans* either as center stage performers or as servile bystanders, but in all cases they remain marginalized. Whereas the Louis Armstrong performance in *The Beat Generation* establishes the interpretive perspective that the movie utilizes to portray the beats and suggests a critique of bohemian racial intermixing, in *The Subterraneans* neither black performers nor black characters have any substantial purpose: whatever they do, they are always in the background, even when on stage.

In contrast to frequently vague and ambiguous allusions to racial intermixing and homosexuality, the mass media presented gender relations among the beats more directly, often portraying women as either thoroughly subordinate or remarkable autonomous. When the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a series on beatniks in its Sunday magazine

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[179] *The Subterraneans*, 1960, dir. Ranald MacDougall.

supplement, the cover pictured a female figure looking out a window, with the caption "beach chick: life is a drag, man."[180] Although this suggested that such a "chick" belonged to the bohemian milieu of North Beach, the series itself occasionally quoted female beats but otherwise portrayed beatnik life as a distinctly male enterprise. Similarly, the *San Francisco News*, assessing the clientele in the Place, reported a "smattering of girls with either long black hair or ponytails, thick glasses and intense looks," and the *San Francisco Examiner*, reporting on a group of beatniks who mounted a mock tourist invasion of downtown San Francisco, observed that the "uniforms of the day" for women were "black slacks or shorts and long hair."[181] These depictions of ponytailed women dressed in black, with "thick glasses" and "intense looks," invading the bastions of conformity alongside their male counterparts, implied that beatnik women established a visible and autonomous position within the bohemian milieu.

However, when a female habitue of North Beach was brutally murdered, San Francisco newspapers used her to depict beatnik women as psychologically disturbed and to insinuate that romantic relationships among bohemians were inherently unstable. In June 1958, Connie Sublette was strangled by a seaman.[182] Three days before she died, her

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[180]*This World*, 15 June 1958, 1.

[181]Brown, 15 June 1958, p. 1; Luther Nichols, "Beatniks Leave Bay Area Scene," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 December 1959, sec. 5, p. 7; Murphy, "What's Phony;" "No. 1 Beatnik Jailed as Disciples Parade," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 August 1958, no sec., p. 1, Anderson, Dyanne--Beatnik Girl envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[182]Peter Trimble, "Killer Says 'Beat' Girl Spurned Him," *San Francisco Examiner*, 19 June 1958, no sec., n. p., "Harris, Frank--Murder" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

estranged boyfriend, Paul Swanson, got drunk and fell to his death from the roof of Eric's Party Pad in North Beach.[183] The *Examiner* described Swanson as an "unemployed cab driver who fancied himself a poet" and presented Sublette as a "playgirl" and "habitue of Beat Generation hangouts," the "slender girl with the far off eyes" who "looked at the stars and wanted to keep on going" but "flipped" on the many occasions when she drank alcohol excessively.[184] Similarly, the *Chronicle* called Sublette a "starry-eyed debutante" who "complained that death was dancing all around her."[185] Moreover, newspapers revealed that she "considered herself the fiancé" of Swanson but had not seen her common law husband Al Sublette for several weeks, and "just lived around."[186] In the pages of Bay Area newspapers, Connie Sublette was erratic, emotionally unstable and constantly searching for peace of mind. She lived fiercely and independently but was insecure and obsessed with dying. Furthermore, she was romantically involved with at least two men but was not legally married and apparently "lived around" with multiple men, suggesting that beatniks often engaged in casual sexual relationships but found it difficult to establish long term relationships. Finally, these accounts of Sublette and

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[183]"Poet of 'Beat Generation' Dies at Party," *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 June 1958, no sec., p. 1., "Swanson, P" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[184]Ibid.; "Seaman in Court on 'Beat' Murder," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 July 1958, no sec., n. p., "Harris, Frank--Murder" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC; Trimble, "Killer Says 'Beat' Girl Spurned Him."

[185]George Draper, [title missing], *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 June 1958, no sec., p. 1, "Harris, Frank--Murder" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[186]Trimble, "Killer Says 'Beat' Girl Spurned Him."

Swanson implied that bohemian men and women were essentially similar in their abuse of drugs, their emotional insecurity and their inability to maintain long-term commitments, whether personal or professional.

While the *Los Angeles Times* hinted at a tangible level of gender equality among beats, it also insinuated that sexual promiscuity made bohemian women suicidal. The *Times* noted that beatnik women were "like the males in philosophy and action" but that "the principal difference is in their dress:" females were "addicted to clothing that doesn't fit," donning "black wool stockings, dark green or black skirts, black sweaters and flat-heel walking shoes," with "long straight hair and severe eye make-up."[187] The similarity between bohemian men and women in "philosophy and action" implied a tangible level of gender equality within the beat generation, and women dressed in black, with comfortable walking shoes, unstyled hair and "severe" cosmetics suggested that they consciously chose not to "fit" with social norms governing female appearance and behavior. Yet the *Times* also reported an increase in suicide among beatniks, "particularly among young women who seem less able than young men to go from affair to affair without emotional involvement."[188] This intimated that sexual promiscuity among beats took an especially harsh toll on women, who presumably sought long-term romantic commitment rather than a constant parade of sexual partners. As portrayed here, beat women used outlandish cosmetics and clothing to conceal fears about not

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[187]Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," 33.

[188]Ibid.

snaring husbands or committed boyfriends. Apparently, bohemian women renounced bourgeois norms regarding feminine appearance yet clung to conventional notions that encouraged women to find husbands, have children and maintain stable domestic roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

Similarly, the *Los Angeles Mirror News* left few doubts regarding the subordinate place of beat women. The paper found that "women in the Beat Generation, indeed, appear to be a part of it solely to satisfy the sexual needs of the men."[189] At a jazz-poetry performance, "the girls or women, if any, sit by silently," and among beats overall, "few of the women are wives because marriage and a family, like property, is considered an encumbrance to the creative life."[190] Although this last quote could be gender neutral, implying that both men and women who considered themselves writers or artists believed that marriage and children interfered with their intellectual endeavors, the other passages suggested to the contrary that male bohemians viewed women as a potential hindrance to their own creative work, and thus avoided marital relationships in order to preserve their own economic freedom in the event of pregnancy. Moreover, the *Mirror News* found it "significant" that the beats "produced no female writers" and speculated that "this may be because the sex has been notoriously insensitive" to the highly improvised jazz that many male beatniks found so inspiring.[191] It is more likely that another variety of notorious

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[189]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home on Coast," sec. 1, p. 4.

[190]Ibid., p. 3-4.

[191]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home on Coast," sec. 1, p. 4.

insensitivity was at work here, one in which the male journalist who wrote this article and the bohemian men he described perceived women as subservient and understood both artistic creativity and bohemian nonconformity as essentially male enterprises. With such assumptions, it was quite acceptable that there were no established women writers in the beat generation and that most women consented to "sit by silently" in the audience while men took center stage.

As with newspapers, mass-circulation magazines often alluded to both subordination and equality for the women of the beat generation. *Look* often portrayed female beatniks as emotionally weak but also suggested that relationships between male and female bohemians to be essentially equitable. When a woman hosted a party at her home, the "savage drumbeat that fills the rooms" lifted her to "momentary ecstasy," but later the "confusion" became "almost too much for her."[192] She only found "peace" while "sketching in the afternoon sunlight."[193] Here, beat women could serve as hostesses, but their frailty made it impossible to participate in the intense revelry of North Beach parties. Yet the magazine also featured the assemblage artist Wallace Berman and his wife Shirley, observing that "Shirley works while Wally attends to cultural matters and the rearing of their boy," and that they both "put together an avant-garde magazine."[194] This suggested that bohemian couples reconfigured conventional gender roles, with the wife

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[192]Leonard, "Bored, the Bearded and the Beat," 67

[193]Ibid.

[194]Ibid.

employed and the husband serving as child rearer, and that they both participated in artistic work. Similarly, while *Life* assumed that beats were men, its occasional references to women suggested both male superiority and female autonomy among bohemians. The beat generation was a "largely male society" in which men "spoke fondly and with such vehemence" about "pad-sharing chicks," but what such men "really seem to want from femininity, furthermore, is financial support."[195] In this instance, male bohemians seemed fully supportive of the economic empowerment of women as means to financial independence for themselves, and presumably the "pad-sharing chicks" would cook and clean as well as provide monetary support. Yet the "occasional pallid and sullen girls" of the beat generation "are usually so dominated by their own jangling complaints that romance seldom blooms for long."[196] This intimation of "jangling complaints" among beat women implied that they were not passive but rather autonomous, capable of articulating the many grievances of the beat generation and preventing men from exploiting them economically or sexually.

When *Playboy* explored the gender dynamics at work inside coffeehouses, it brought the promotion of countercultural tourism to the forefront by instructing male readers in the art of finding casual sex partners. Any man trying to impress these "cute but mixed-up girls" must abandon the "robust, hyper-hearty approach" and instead "play

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[195]O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 129.

[196]Ibid., 116, 129.

it cool," "become part of the scene" and thus master the "beat mating technique."[197] One such Casanova chose a coffeehouse, "strolled in unobtrusively" and "quietly placed his order," then sat "peering sullenly into his gradually cooling Cappucino."[198] After a few minutes acting "inner-directed and withdrawn," a "low feminine voice husked in his ear" to ask if anything was wrong, at which point "the girl was hooked."[199] Here, the sulkiness of beatniks and the inner-direction that social critic David Riesman attributed to men in nineteenth-century America were combined to form the perfect pick-up routine, demonstrating that social criticism as well as avant-garde intellectual life could be exploited in the pursuit of casual sex.[200] Furthermore, *Playboy* opined that the excess of actors and actresses in Hollywood meant that "the highest percentage of nubile femininity is on tap" in L.A. As an example, the magazine featured the "beautnik" Yvette Vickers as "beat playmate."[201] Vickers was an aspiring actress who felt passionate about the poetry of Dylan Thomas, raced Jaguars in the desert to find "kicks" that satiated her "reckless and uninhibited" character, and hung out at the Cosmo Alley in Hollywood,

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[197]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 95.

[198]Ibid.

[199]Ibid.

[200]On "inner-directed" and "other-directed" people, see David Riesman, in collaboration with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study in the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

[201]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 95; "Beat Playmate," *Playboy*, July 1959, 47.

"frowning prettily on conformity."[202] The ability of *Playboy* to incorporate bohemian unconventionality into its sexual objectification of women demonstrated the ease with which the beat generation could be co-opted and the pervasiveness of such exploitation. The magazine made the appreciation of contemporary poetry and the desire to escape the banalities of postwar society into the latest attributes of sexual mass consumption. If the "beat mating technique" suggested that some women rejected hyper-masculine bravado in favor of men who seemed capable of acknowledging their emotions, it also implied that men need only adopt a few trite mannerisms in order to exploit such women. Moreover, the interest Vickers expressed in poetry and her frequent presence at coffeehouses did not distinguish her from the other sexualized images of women in the magazine: she might be beat, but she was still a playmate. Overall, the sullen affectations of men who made coffeehouses their sexual hunting ground and the facile linkage of "beat" and "playmate" suggested that bohemia was just another image circulating in the plethora of mass-media stereotypes, a commercialized cliche that titillated men and denigrated women. To a significant extent, *Playboy* promoted the beat generation because doing so was extremely useful in marketing sophisticated and sexually virile bachelorhood to young men.

Like the print media, movies oscillated between presenting bohemian women as thoroughly subordinate or remarkably independent. In *The Beat Generation*, a woman harbors unrequited affection for man and tells him that "In all the months I've known you, you've never even held my hand," but he replies that he "put down" the "love and

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[202]"Beat Playmate," *Playboy*, July 1959, 47.

marriage bit" because "It's for the rat race and the squares:" "you gotta live for kicks, right here and now, that's all there is."[203] This suggests that the women of the beat generation desire long-term relationships, while their male counterparts equate such commitment with the "rat race" and instead pursue momentary "kicks." It is precisely the instability of marriage and the nuclear family that this movie posits as the raison d'etre of the beat generation, and animosity toward marriage and family permeates the beat milieu in this film. In one scene, a woman reads a poem addressed to all parents, denouncing marriage as the "evil force" of "drab white" that brings children "into this miserable world." The focus of this poetic diatribe is not the "miserable world" in which beatniks must live but rather the "drab white" and "evil force" of matrimony. Similarly, the lead beatnik character is a serial rapist who preys exclusively on suburban housewives, women who personify the domestic tranquility that he and his divorced parents never attained. The detective who pursues him blames women for their victimization, but when the rapist impregnates his wife, he must confront his own misogyny. She threatens to divorce him if he will not adopt the child, and this compels him to reconsider their relationship on her terms: he must acknowledge her as an equal partner, a person capable of making her own decisions. The final seen shows the couple beaming at their newborn child, yet the acrimonious familial relationships that stimulate beatnik criminality implicitly undermine this narrative closure, as couples who fail to achieve such domestic bliss may produce children who, like the rapist, embrace the contemptuous beats as young adults.

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[203] *The Beat Generation*, 1959, dir. Charles Haas.

Moreover, despite the title of the movie, the plot relates to but does not center on the beat generation, as the detective and his wife command far more screen time than any beatnik. Thus beats occupy a peripheral position in a movie that exploits their popularity via a morality tale about the importance of stable nuclear families: the central concern of this film is not the beat generation but rather conventional marriage and family life, and beatniks appear only as a stark reminder of how broken homes contribute to social problems.

In sharp contrast, *The Subterraneans* presents a far more compelling portrait of the challenges women confront in bohemia. The women in this movie exhibit substantial autonomy, none more so than Roxanne, who does not appear in the novel but is one of the most fascinating characters in any Hollywood movie about the beats. Roxanne is independent, articulate and perceptive but extremely vulnerable. In one scene, she discusses a would-be paramour with a female friend, noting acerbically that he is "after me now. A little something to do until you come back to him. He sleeps here now. Sleeps, that's all. He resents it."[204] Roxanne fully comprehends that many bohemian men regard women as a sexual pastime, and she refuses to succumb to such exploitation. She wears excessive make-up in order to mask her beauty from men and thereby protect herself. When a woman tells her that she is very beautiful without cosmetics, Roxanne begins applying heavy black eyeliner and says "I have a face, which it is my pleasure to destroy. A mask if you like. It conceals me from the world. I use it instead of smiles,

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[204]*The Subterraneans*, 1960, dir. Ranald MacDougall.

and false cordiality, and all the other things people use to hide their hatred of each other."[205] This cosmetic cloak simultaneously strengthens and weakens Roxanne, enabling her to resist the sexual advances of self-centered men but preventing her from feeling love. When a man becomes infatuated with her, she initially rebukes him, saying "Oh god please leave me alone. Don't you understand I hate all men?"[206] Yet after they have sex, she realizes for the first time in her life that she can feel love, and her cosmetics no longer provide a shield from either the outside world or her own emotions. When he expresses regret for cheating on his girlfriend, she responds, "How dare you come to me with your guilt! How dare you tell me the truth! Do you know how useful lies can be? How beautiful it is not to look at reality? I've never felt pain before, its agony."[207] Roxanne discovers the "truth" that she can feel love and thus be emotionally dependent and vulnerable, an insight that leads her to abandon bohemia. In her final scene, she wears a conventional skirt, blouse and make-up rather than her usual black leotards and grave eye liner. She tells him that "you've made me know that I can love. I think I hate you for that."[208] As she leaves, two male subterraneans taunt her, saying "going straight, my dear?" and "oh no, not real tears."[209] Roxanne survives in bohemia by building a

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[205]Ibid.

[206]Ibid.

[207]Ibid.

[208]Ibid.

[209]Ibid.

psychological barrier between herself and other people, particularly men. This barrier gives her substantial autonomy, but it cannot permanently shield her from her own emotions, and without it she must endure mockery from men that she never tolerates before. Indeed, her transformation is total: initially she is the strongest person in the movie, a woman who comprehends the sexual inequities of bohemia and develops her own way of confronting male bravado, yet by the end she is utterly vulnerable and must flee subterranean life.

Like *The Subterraneans*, the television program *Route 66* occasionally presented powerful female characters with traces of bohemian unconventionality. In keeping with the clean cut image of the protagonists, Buz and Tod, one such character was not a shabby beatnik but a rich, beautiful and free-spirited heiress. After her family dies in an accident, Vicki Russell buys a motorcycle, dons black leather pants and travels across America, letting "grief ride outside on a motorcycle of its own" (script writer Sterling Silliphant hit his outlandish peak with the dialogue in this episode).[210] After Vicki leads police on a high speed chase and winds up in jail, Buz and Tod bail her out. At one point she gives Buz a lesson in the meaning of Zen, instructing him to "keep nothing in reserve, let nothing go to waste. Express nothing under disguise, put all of you into what you feel."[211] This scene starkly reveals the extent to which television, with a facile marriage of Buddha and Pollyanna, could liquidate virtually all the meaningful content from a

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[210]"How Much a Pound Is Albatross?" *Route 66*.

[211]Ibid.

belief system that beat writers like Kerouac and especially Ginsberg, Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder regarded with deep reverence. Vicki appears before a judge who, before giving her a suspended sentence and ordering her out of town, rebukes her and the unconventionality she embodies, proclaiming that "in the circumstances, your bizarre and bohemian behavior in this community is even more inexcusable. Your dedication to nonconformity, your flouting of convention, your specific violation of the statutes of this city," all of this would be bad enough if it came from a "recidivistic vagrant," but for "a girl who has wealth, education, and advantages available to few, such behavior is even more unforgivable."[212] The judge invokes bohemian nonconformity in his condemnation of Vicki, but he reserves his harshest criticism for her disregard of the responsibility and respect that, he believes, wealth both provides and demands. Yet Vicki does not repent, telling the judge that "it's not easy to be a pilgrim or a rebel. But how else can you give yourself to life? I'm not looking for myself," because "what I want can't be found by looking, only by living. So I've given myself to life and let it take me where it will."[213] Her defiance of conventional behavior is far more extreme than that of Tod and Buz, but like them she wants only to experience life and to learn from it. Thus, *Route 66* links bohemian alternatives with a quest to find meaning and fulfillment, a linkage in which criminality is only one manifestation of a more fundamental desire for raw experience. Whereas newspapers and movies often regarded criminality as a key component of

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[212]Ibid.

[213]Ibid.

postwar bohemianism, here the crime is far less dangerous and the nonconformity much more difficult to prevent: the judge does not seek to punish or rehabilitate Vicki, only to denounce and banish her.

While most of the women in *Route 66* are not as unorthodox as Vicki, Buz and Tod treat them all as equals, whether they require manly assistance or rather can aid the protagonists themselves. In one episode a sadistic cattle rancher frames a woman for stealing from her employer and then, as her parole adviser, tries to manipulate her into marrying him. Buz and Tod force the rancher to admit that he framed the woman, thus shaming him into leaving her alone.[214] Here, the male aggression of the rancher can be neutralized only by equally strong but benevolent men like Buz and Tod. Yet when they confront the independence and assertiveness of a woman like Vicki, Tod and Buz equivocate. When Tod and Vicki are stranded in the desert, Vicki instructs him to cut up her motorcycle tires and assemble makeshift hats that will protect them from the heat. Tod replies, "I'm glad I'm not one of those men who stops feeling like a man when a woman starts acting like a man should."[215] Tod simultaneously respects and resents the autonomy of a woman like Vicki: he appreciates her knowledge of emergency survival, but her assertiveness makes him feel that, as a man, he should know how to do such things himself. Tod may not stop "feeling like a man" when confronted with female authority, but he clearly perceives a personal deficiency when he cannot act as he

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[214]"Sheba," *Route 66*.

[215]"How Much a Pound?" *Route 66*.

"should" vis a vis women. Nonetheless, in their refusal to equate "feeling like a man" with male superiority, Buz and Tod embody a nuanced and sensitive masculinity rarely found in mass-media portrayals of bohemians and virtually absent in beat literature written by men.

Messages Received

Audiences expressed a broad range of responses to mass-media depictions of the beat generation. While readers of newspaper and magazines were often passionate in attacking or praising the beats, movie-goers seemed much less interested and film critics almost universally denounced both *The Beat Generation* and *The Subterraneans*. At the box office, *The Beat Generation* opened strong in Los Angeles but grossed just $147,800 after playing in eight cities, while *The Subterraneans*, playing in only four cities, grossed $88,900. By comparison, *Psycho* made $56,000 at one theater alone in its fifth week of release.[216] Most reviewers liked none of it, singling out *The Beat Generation* as an

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[216]As reported in *Variety*, *The Beat Generation* played in San Francisco, L.A., New York City, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Washington, D.C. and Louisville, and *The Subterraneans*, in what was apparently a more limited release, played in San Francisco, L.A., New York City and St. Louis. Because *Variety* occasionally altered the cities included in its film revenue calculation, these movies may have played in other cities as well, although it is unlikely that this would substantially raise the total revenue figures for either movie. Outside of San Francisco and New York, both movies often played on a double bill. Box office data for *A Bucket of Blood* is harder to attain, but in a one week run in Detroit the movie made $9,500 on a double bill. Because *Variety* reported revenue only from select theaters in certain cities, and because *A Bucket of Blood* likely had a limited release, it is reasonable to assume its overall box office performance was as lackluster as those of *The Beat Generation* and *The Subterraneans*. For revenue grosses for *The Beat Generation*, see "'Girl' OK $14,000, Frisco; 'Horse' 9G," *Variety*,

especially acute Hollywood travesty. Filled with "Freudian cases who impersonate statues and gaze moronically," *Variety* concluded that "even to the person who feels the beatnik is a pseudo-intellectual living in a fake Bohemia, this depiction is a ludicrous one."[217] The *New York Times*, castigating the film with a vehemence that only New Yorkers pondering the cultural catastrophes of Los Angeles can achieve, called it

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15 July 1959, 8; "L.A. Bright; 'Hercules' Boff [sic] $45,000, 'Hills' - 'Beat' Fair 11G, 'Porgy' Wow 23 1/2G, 'North' Sock 23G, 'Story' 14G," *Variety*, 5 August 1959, 8; "L.A. Rosy; 'Circus' Bright $30,000, 'Scapegoat' Wham 11G, 'For Me' Fat 22G, 'Hercules' 18G, 'North' 19G, 3d," *Variety*, 12 August 1959, 8; "L.A. Stout; 'Museum' Bangup $20,000, 'Fisherman' Sock 12G, 'Pennies' 15G, 'North' Boffo 19G, 4th, 'Porgy' 23G," *Variety*, 19 August 1959, 8; "Cincy Perks; 'Kiss' Sock $13,000, 'Jones' Okay 8G, 'North' Bangup 13G, 3d," *Variety*, 26 August 1959, 9; "New Pix Perk Philly; 'Rocket' Robust $12,000, 'Scapegoat' Hep 13G, 'Affair' 10G; 'North' Sturdy 16G, 'Hole' 11G," *Variety*, 2 September 1959, 8; "'Cordura' Bangup $9,000, Mpls.; 'Best' Torrid 8G, 'Pillow' Huge 18G, 2d," *Variety*, 28 October 1959, 8; "Washington," *Variety*, 19 August 1959, 10; "Washington," *Variety*, 26 August 1959, 18; "'North' Giant 20G, L'ville; 'Kelly' 5G," *Variety*, 2 September 1959, 9. For *The Subterraneans*, see "'Portrait' Mighty 28G, Frisco; 'Bells' Lush $16,000, 'Strangers' Big $12,000," *Variety*, 6 July 1960, 8; "B'way Okay; 'Elmer' Sockeroo 55G, 'Battle' Wow 23G, 'Strangers' Boff 40 1/2G, 'Bells' Great 178G for 3d," *Variety*, 13 July 1960, 11; "B'way Holds Solid; 'Terrace' Great 76G, 'World' Wow 38G, 'School' Loud $14,600, 'Psycho' Rousing 56G, 5th," *Variety*, 20 July 1960, 9; "B'way OK; 'Terrace' Smooth $56,500, 'World' Trim 24G, Both 2d; 'Gantry' 31G, 3d; 'Psycho' Great $56,600, 6th," *Variety*, 27 July 1960, 9; "'Ghosts' Huge 28G, Frisco; 'Hur' 23G," *Variety*, 20 July 1960, 8; "Broadway," *Variety*, 3 August 1960, 24; "San Francisco," *Variety*, 27 July 1960, 20; "'Terrace' Big 19G, Frisco; Lewis 28G," *Variety*, 3 August 1960, 11; "L.A. Way Off; 'Young Men' Big 27G, 'Love' 15G, 3d; 'Bells' Light $14,000, 'Eternity' Hep 13G, 2d; 'Psycho' 7G," *Variety*, 14 September 1960, 16; "Los Angeles," *Variety*, 21 September 1960, 23; "Los Angeles," *Variety*, 28 September 1960, 28; "TV Preems Dent L.A.; 'Song' Sweet $19,500, 'Stairs' Flighty 15G, 'Flags' Fair 14G, 'Campobello' Lush $13,500," *Variety*, 5 October 1960, 8; "'Stairs' Lofty 15G, St. Loo [sic]; 'Usher' 19G," *Variety*, 12 October 1960, 19; "'Song' Smash 18G, St. Loo; 'Time' 7G," *Variety*, 19 October 1960, 8; "San Francisco," *Variety*, 10 August 1960, 17. For *A Bucket of Blood*, see "Auto Layoffs Clip Det.; 'Odds' OK at $15,000; 'Town' Dull 9G, 'Career' 15 1/2G," *Variety*, 11 November 1959, 9.

[217]Ron, "The Beat Generation," *Variety*, 1 July 1959, 6.

"excruciating and tasteless," a "corny," "contrived" and "incredible" affair that was "enough to make any member or non-member [of the beat generation] walk outside the theatre and butt his head against the wall."[218] The *Los Angeles Times* emphasized that the plot "has little to do with beatniks except as they are used to provide strange atmosphere for a cops-and-robbers story" that itself was "belabored unmercifully."[219] Reviews of *The Subterraneans* emphasized its failure to translate the prose of Kerouac onto film and occasionally linked its artistic inadequacies to its San Francisco setting. The *Los Angeles Times* found it "a self-consciously solemn charade in an embarrassing disproportion to the triviality of what it finally reveals," a movie that "skillfully drained" all of the "convoluted complexity" from the prose of Kerouac.[220] *Variety* found merit in the "outstanding" jazz performance scenes but called the movie itself a "lackluster screen invasion of Jack Kerouac's coffee-shop-worn fad."[221] More stridently, *Film Quarterly* proclaimed that "the acting is 100 per cent fake" and deplored these "*Vogue*-type beats," particularly the character Mardou, an "obsessive, possessive nympho" who "has a $50 hairdo, I.-Magnin sack dresses, and a nifty apartment–but not 15 cents to get to the city

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[218]Howard Thompson, "'Beat Generation,'" *New York Times*, 22 October 1959, p. 47.

[219]John L. Scott, "Intrigue, Beatniks Share Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 1959, sec. 3, p. 9.

[220]Charles Stinson, "'The Subterraneans' Pretentious Charade," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1960, sec. 1, p. 27.

[221]Tube, "The Subterraneans," *Variety*, 22 June 1960, 6.

psychiatrist."[222] Yet other reviews attributed the failure of the film to the particular bohemian enclave it dramatized. The *New York Times*, perhaps seeking to defend Greenwich Village against California upstarts, called *The Subterraneans* "a colorless pot-pourri of romance and disjointed drama," but the paper emphasized that the movie "should illustrate that San Francisco's contemporary Bohemians are the most of what turns out to be nothing at all," people who "wallow in self-pity," gab in "their own gnarled patois" about their "substandard art forms," and "prove that their suffering is not nearly so acute as that of a dispassionate observer of their aimless follies."[223] Not merely the movie but San Francisco bohemians themselves failed to achieve anything remotely substantial or even intriguing, and thus any attempt to capture them on film could only highlight their miserable absurdity.

Amidst this din of denunciation from New York and Los Angeles, some San Francisco newspapers applauded *The Subterraneans* as a captivating depiction of North Beach, often assuming the role of civic boosters for Bay Area bohemians and occasionally linking their praise of the film to their empathy with the beats. The *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* called the acting of Leslie Caron "an 'in depth' portrayal of stunning quality" and praised the plot, which "builds to an explosive climax" and "then resolves its wild confusion just as suddenly" in an "effective ending to an interesting

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[222]"Entertainments," *Film Quarterly*, 14.1 (Fall 1960): 62.

[223]A. H. Weiler, "Screen: 'Subterraneans,'" *New York Times*, 7 July 1960, p. 26.

film."[224] The *San Francisco Examiner* expressed even more enthusiasm. Shortly before the premiere, the paper noted that "the picture is said to be the first objective treatment of America's New Bohemians–the poets, painters and thinkers often inaccurately referred to under the group title of 'Beats.'"[225] This was one of very few instances in which the mass media overtly distinguished bohemians from the beat generation, but as with contrasts between beats and beatniks, the emphasis here was on the creativity of the "New Bohemians" versus the implied lack of talent and initiative among "Beats." Yet the movie critic at the *Examiner* praised the film for capturing "the spirit of the city" and averred that "as an old San Franciscan, Beatniks, to me, represent youth in revolt," part of a long line that included Ambrose Bierce, Ina Coolbrith, George Sterling and Mary Austin, all of whom, like the beats, represented a "mad, crazy and confused" rebellion as it was "lived in these parts."[226] While many reviewers veiled their implicit distaste for the beat generation beneath denunciations of inept acting and ineffective directing, the "old San Franciscan" sensibilities of this critic led to praise for a film that seemed a realistic portrait of San Francisco and its contemporary bohemian atmosphere. Thus the single most positive review of the movie came from an individual who admired the beats, suggesting both that this critic allowed civic pride to obscure weaknesses in the film and

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[224]Emilia Hodel, "Beautiful Beatnikville," *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*, 24 June 1960, no sec., n. p., Kerouac, Jack Biographical File (Vertical), SFHC.

[225]"MGM Looks at the World of Beatniks," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 June 1960, sec. 2, p. 4.

[226]Hortense Morton, "'Subterraneans'--Superior!" *San Francisco Examiner*, 24 June 1960, sec. 2, p. 7.

that other reviewers harbored such bias against the beat generation that they could not appreciate any cinematic portrayal of the subject. The *Examiner* frequently ridiculed North Beach bohemians, and this aberrant opinion resulted from the individual perceptions of one staff writer rather than a shift in editorial outlook regarding the beats. Nonetheless, if the *News-Call Bulletin* and the *Examiner* seemed excessive in applauding what most critics found sorely lacking, they also revealed that not all Bay Area journalists reviled the beat generation. Indeed, a few San Francisco journalists viewed the beats not as an annoying anomaly but rather the latest chapter in a long history of bohemian abundance unique to their city.

Not everyone agreed, chief among them the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which assumed that North Beach was the only bohemia in California worthy of cinematic attention but found little merit in bohemians themselves. The *Chronicle* dismissed *The Beat Generation* as an unconvincing depiction of the very different bohemians of Los Angeles, calling the movie "real square" and speculating that "the change of scene had something to do with it," as the beatniks of Venice, with their "parties that seem much further out than ones up here," seemed out of place when "transplanted" to San Francisco theaters.[227] Essentially, the *Chronicle* implied that genuine bohemians lived in North Beach while beatnik posers inhabited Los Angeles. Similarly, in its review of *The Subterraneans*, the *Chronicle* concluded that "for the dramatic values of the picture the

[227]Thomas Albright, "'Beat Generation' a Square," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 July 1959, sec. 2, p. 28.

drabness of the beats had to be avoided," suggesting a contrast between the dreary denizens of Venice and their more colorful counterparts in San Francisco.[228] Yet the *Chronicle* found little merit in its own bohemia, praising *The Subterraneans* because it "does not hesitate to appraise certain elements" of the North Beach "with candor," particularly the "selfishness," the "childish refusal to accept responsibility" and the "gamy pattern of their existence."[229] Furthermore, the *Chronicle* appreciated the morality tale in which two young lovers must abandon bohemia in order to develop a stable relationship, observing that Leo and Mardou "find maturity" only after escaping the "pathetic frustrations of these unguided children."[230] Indeed, the *Chronicle* found it perfectly appropriate that "San Francisco's 'New Bohemian' colony is revealed with romantic sympathy" throughout the movie and "then thoughtfully discarded" in the final scene.[231] In short, the *Chronicle* lauded a movie about North Beach only for its revelations of indolence and irresponsibility in a desultory environment that two heroic lovers managed to escape. Moreover, the paper seemed appreciative of San Francisco bohemians only when contrasting them with the even greater absurdity of beatniks in Los Angeles. Like many Hollywood producers, the *Chronicle* assumed that an engaging movie about bohemia must highlight the shortcomings of bohemians themselves.

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[228]Paine Knickerbocker, "Caron Brilliant in 'Subterraneans,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 June 1960, sec. 3, p. 28.

[229]Ibid.

[230]Ibid.

[231]Ibid.

If reviewers of movies about the beats typically found little to praise, the Maynard G. Krebs character in *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* gained the adoration of baby boomers in the early 1960s, despite his obvious satirization of beatniks.[232] One viewer recalled that "though Bob Denver was supposed to be a parody of the beatnik, he actually embodied everything that was kind and gentle and positive about both Beat and hippie subcultures," and concluded that "Maynard was an admirable person."[233] Another viewer insisted that "Maynard G. Krebs was a satire on beatniks, but that didn't matter because beatness shone through," beatness meaning an individual who "did not respond to the mainstream of varsity culture," someone whose "out-of-it irrelevance" made him "a free

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[232]In turning from the responses of movie critics to those of "ordinary" viewers and readers, it is important to note that while literary critics and cultural studies scholars such as Stanley Fish and Dorothy Hobson have argued that there are no theoretical limits to the number of meanings that audiences can bring to texts, Janice A. Radway makes the important counterpoint that "there are patterns or regularities to what viewers and readers bring to texts in large part because they acquire specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location," meaning that "similar readings are produced" because "similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes." In the analysis that follows, it is abundantly clear that people responded to the beats based on how they perceived their own "social location," not with regard to education or socio-economic status but rather concerning their perceptions of postwar society, specifically the extent to which America either did or did not face some sort of fundamental cultural malaise. Like Radway, I find certain recurring patterns in the responses of audiences, yet this is not meant to limit the range of interpretive possibilities but rather to highlight how any reading is inextricably linked to perceptions of "social location" among readers and viewers. See Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984, reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 8; Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Hobson, *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera* (London: Methuen, 1982).

[233]Jim Jones, email message to author, 14 May 1999.

man."[234] Calling Maynard a "post-romantic, a dreaming realist," this viewer remembered that "I didn't know what a bohemian was, but I knew one when I saw one," and "I sensed that a beatnik was what I wanted to be."[235] Later, as a teenager, this individual felt "ready and willing to be a Beat, just born too late and forced to live a hippie life which was much less to my inclination," although "in hippie there was Beat."[236] Both of these viewers easily recognized that Maynard distorted the beats, but they nonetheless felt that he embodied adversarial impulses. In short, the satire of beatniks could not mask what some audience members regarded as the substance of bohemian alternatives.

Similarly, the ability of newspapers and magazines to exploit the beat generation commercially did not prevent audiences from developing their own interpretations. Indeed, readers responded to print-media coverage of the beats with both righteous indignation and empathic understanding, but almost everyone who wrote to an editor focused on the extent to which the beat generation did or did not represent positive social and cultural change. The beats polarized the readerships of most newspapers and magazines: letters tended either to dismiss the beats outright or to insist that they embodied a much needed transformation in postwar American life. Many readers concluded that the beat generation was immature, selfish and unworthy of such extensive

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[234]Glen O'Brien, "The Beat Goes On," in Lisa Phillips, ed., *Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 169-172.

[235]Ibid.

[236]Ibid.

media exposure, but others believed the beats were at the forefront of a broad reorientation of American society and culture. Still others criticized newspapers and magazines for using a narrow range of distortions and stereotypes to represent a much broader and multifaceted phenomenon.[237]

Many readers were adamant in either their condemnation or celebration of the beats and indicated no willingness to compromise. One person complained that the beats displayed an "utter bankruptcy of thought" and a "complete poverty of mind" that together formed "monuments to absolutely nothing."[238] Another letter thundered that "Moral degenerates of all ages have had their excuses."[239] More ominously, an Army captain who had just returned to the U.S. after two years overseas found that beatniks, along with the Angry Young Men (a British literary group often compared with the beats) and Jerry Lee Lewis, portended a "very evident change in our country's cultural and amusement pursuits:" "When a supposedly enlightened people commence raising such

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[237]In most cases, readers were evenly divided for and against the beat generation, although many concluded that the beats made a relevant critique of postwar consumerism but offered no practical solutions. The exception was *Time*, whose readers were overwhelmingly negative in their reactions to the beats, which probably reflected that fact that *Time* was more critical of the beats than any other magazine discussed in this chapter.

The wide array of responses to the beat generation by readers of newspapers and magazines is analogous to what one scholar of pulp magazines, borrowing a term from Michel de Certeau, calls "poachers," readers who prioritize certain aspects of popular culture texts based on their own interests, concerns and pre-occupations. See Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 7, 13; and de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[238]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 34.

[239]"The Editor's Mail Box," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 May 1958, sec. 2, p. 2.

types to positions of wealth and influence, then we as a nation have taken a long step toward fulfilling Marx's prophecy for capitalism. It is obvious that our churches, schools and parents have a monumental job ahead."[240] For readers with a strong sense of patriotism, the beat generation represented not merely intellectual vacuity but moreover a fundamental shift in the cultural life of America that, left unchecked, portended dire consequences for the survival of the free world. At the other extreme, one reader wanted to "applaud the Beat[s] for having the courage to live the way they please, rather than the way someone else tells them they should," and affirmed that "Their philosophy makes a lot more sense to me" than the "middle-class struggle to keep up with the Joneses."[241] Another admirer believed that the beats belonged to "the same sort of unrest that gave rise to the expatriate 'Lost Generation,'" and maintained that "Free thought cannot be squelched nor disillusioned out of existence."[242] Thus some readers felt a strong affinity for the willingness of the beats to reject commodity accumulation as a marker of success and to express their views publicly in the face of wide spread opposition. Moreover, many of these letters revealed that the beats seemed to represent crucial changes in postwar culture that might have substantial impact on the future of the nation. Whether the beat generation augured hope or alarm, it resonated sharply for many people.

In contrast to such clear cut opinions, many readers adopted a more nuanced

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[240]"Letters," *Time*, 30 June 1958, 4.

[241]"Letters to the Editor," *Look*, 30 September 1958, 17.

[242]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, September 1959, 9, 12.

perspective and applauded the beats for criticizing postwar society but faulted them not providing feasible solutions. This was a very prominent theme in reader letters. One individual argued that beatniks undertook "a just rebellion against the excesses of a generation of materialism," but insisted that "they cannot escape the responsibilities of intelligent citizenship and moral leadership."[243] Another reader opined that "the Beats have put their finger on what is wrong with America, but their solutions are as deadly as the situation they abhor," and called on Americans to renounce "cowardice" and "escapism" and realize that "We need more involvement in the world, not less."[244] Another reader asked, "Why have the beatniks, with all their admitted mediocrities, sprung into existence?"[245] He concluded that "The distortions of beatnik society are almost a direct mirror image of the intellectual, artistic and spiritual poverty of American life."[246] Similarly, one man believed that the beat generation was "excessive and confused" but also "indicative of a change in values on a large scale by many people" who "refuse to identify themselves with the fragmented, meaningless work of industrial and military society."[247] With greater complexity, one reader suggested that the beat generation exposed a problem for which there was no easy solution. Arguing that beats

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[243]"The Mailbag," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 26 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 15.

[244]"Letters to the Editors," *Life*, 21 December 1959, 10.

[245]"Letters to the Editors," *Life*, 12 October 1959, 16, 18.

[246]Ibid.

[247]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30.

"have lost all self-discipline and all interest in life," he asked "what of the rest of us?"[248] Americans pursued "avid literary interests" only when "the long, boring, thought-provoking words are sufficiently watered down for screen and TV," and displayed a "strong desire to exist" in a society "made secure by our vote for bigger and better corporations, labor unions and governments," which "think, fight, feel and live for us."[249] "Who's beat," this man demanded, "who's beat?"[250] Finding little value in beats themselves, this reader implied that mass-media standardization and bureaucratic dominance threatened all Americans. In essence, this reader challenged any facile distinction between rebels and conformists by dismissing the beats and simultaneously criticizing the institutions that dominated postwar cultural, political and economic life. Thus many readers could not simply rebuke or praise the beat generation, finding its rejection of postwar social norms relevant but worrying, to varying degrees, about the viability of postwar bohemianism to transform America substantively. That the beats could simultaneously "put their finger on what is wrong" and yet seem "deadly" in their "escapism and cowardice" indicated that their indictment of conformity and materialism was shared by many people, even if their solutions were not.

One of the most frequent criticisms from readers was that the beats belittled the social role of literary intellectuals, a complaint often expressed by aspiring writers. One

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[248]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30

[249]Ibid.

[250]Ibid.

man insisted that "I have no wish, as a practicing poet, nor as a man, to be associated with a group of bums who find such great pleasure" in "living in the nearest and foulest slum with winos and drug addicts."[251] Another letter spoke on behalf of "young poets like myself" who were not "unwashed" or "unshaven" but rather felt "sick and tired of the desecration of our language" and the "turning of our medium into something that is laughable and associated with booze, dope, sex and despair."[252] Insisting that "We want poetry to attain the status it deserves," this reader opined that "great poets never *Howled*–they spoke."[253] Although the mass-print media often castigated the beats for their lack of literary talent, many readers were concerned not only with the merits of Ginsberg or Kerouac as writers but moreover with their conduct, appearance and way of life as very public members of the literati. Great writers were not to associate with, much less celebrate, "winos and drug addicts," nor should they be "unshaven" at poetry readings. Aware that Kerouac and Ginsberg were not merely famous writers but celebrities who appeared in newspapers, magazines, radio and television, these readers were appalled at how the most publicized literary avant-garde of the postwar years seemed to participate enthusiastically in the degradation of intellectual life.

More frequent targets of criticism were newspapers and magazines themselves, as many readers objected to the way the beat generation was portrayed. Such complaints

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[251]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, September 1959, 9.

[252]"Letters," *Time*, 2 March 1959, 2, 4.

[253]Ibid.

often came from people who loathed beatniks. In some cases, the mere fact that the beats appeared in print at all caused anger. One reader called it a "pity" to "waste so much time and attention on a group that seems content to grovel in the garbage," while another opined that beats "profess to a detachment almost inhuman" but "seem to have stampeded to the invitation to all that publicity."[254] Furthermore, some people who lived in Venice and North Beach bristled at the insinuation that either they or their communities belonged to anything remotely resembling the beat generation. One Venice resident told *Life* that "Just because these screwy beatniks have invaded our town (temporarily, I assure you) is no reason to run us down" with incessant depictions of the area as a countercultural mecca.[255] Despite the often satirical and indeed openly hostile tone that the print media displayed toward the beat generation, many readers who fervently disliked beatniks were equally adamant in criticizing how newspapers and magazines portrayed them.

In San Francisco, some intellectuals sought to clarify the relationship between artistic or literary talent on the one hand and bohemia on the other. The poet Ron Loewinsohn told the *Examiner* that it should evaluate writers and artists based on "their individual merits and failures," while "San Francisco's 'bohemia' should be considered separately."[256] Loewinsohn feared that highlighting the eccentricity of North Beach denizens obscured the substantial literary talent of the Bay Area. In contrast, Philip K.

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[254]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30; "The Mailbag," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 30 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 17.

[255]"Letters to the Editors," *Life*, 12 October 1959, 18.

[256]"The Editor's Mail Box," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 May 1958, sec. 2, p. 2.

Dick underscored the link between bohemian unconventionality and literary creativity. Dick, who in later years became a prolific science-fiction writer (one of his novels was adapted as the movie *Bladerunner*), invoked the literary bohemians of eighteenth-century London in a spirited defense of seemingly idle literati. Dick wanted "to join the hue and cry against these lazy nogoodnik Grub Streeters, these poets and artists and idle scribblers who hang around the coffee houses [sic] all day long, doing no work, merely talking, sponging off society, imagining that the world owes them a living."[257] What, he asked, "do these selfish[,] egotistical children, such as Sam Johnson, Daniel Defoe, John Gay, Oliver Goldsmith, Alexander Pope, actually contribute to the growing British empire? Parasites, like that Joseph Addison and Richard Steele hanging around Will's coffee house [sic] publishing their self-adulatory little newspapers."[258] If comparing the beats to the giants of English letters seemed excessive, Dick nonetheless conveyed the sentiment that the superficial eccentricity and leisure of bohemian life could mask the substantial creative achievements of individual writers. Moreover, in referring to literary intellectuals who contributed nothing to the "growing British empire," Dick alluded to a concern of other readers that the beats were of no value to, and might actually threaten, the postwar United States and its vastly increased global power and responsibility.

Some North Beach residents criticized newspapers for conflating any group of individuals, whether serious writers or frivolous revelers, with an entire countercultural

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[257]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30.

[258]Ibid.

milieu. One reader noted that not all bohemians aspired to artistic or literary creativity, insisting that "This writing kick on the part of some is just 'their way,' like motorcycles or bop. What is common to all is the search for meaningful experience–not meaning that points to some distant end, but which is meaningful in itself."[259] In another vein, a reader insisted that the *San Francisco Examiner* did "North Beach bohemians a great injustice" by implying that "every one [sic] here is either a loafer or a bum."[260] Noting that most bohemians were employed, he emphasized that people resided in North Beach because "they find the companionship of other artists and intellectuals more stimulating than the company of salesmen, bank clerks and female newspaper reporters" (a reference to author of a series on North Beach).[261] More forcefully, a reader informed the *San Francisco Chronicle* that "by your sensationalizing a select few among a larger group not given to decadence, you have succeeded quite successfully in making the whole Bohemian element misunderstood and condemned."[262] He opined that "your paper is doubtless selling more, but it is not telling enough, nor is what it says presented without the reek of yellow journalism which capitalizes on the bizarre, the sensational and the unfortunate."[263] Thus readers chastised newspapers for conflating the whole of

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[259]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30.

[260]"The Editor's Mail Box," *San Francisco Examiner*, 23 May 1958, sec. 2, p. 2.

[261]Ibid.

[262]"Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 June 1958, sec. 2, p. 30.

[263]Ibid.

bohemianism with either avant-garde literary circles or the frivolous antics of a few people, when they believed that the countercultural milieu of North Beach was a much broader phenomenon.

One characteristic that the mass-print media ascribed to the beat generation was the subordination of women, yet some of the most impassioned letters defending beat writers and criticizing media distortions of postwar bohemianism came from women and appeared in *Playboy*. When the magazine published Kerouac's essay "The Origins of the Beat Generation," one woman called it "a true classic" and opined that *Playboy* "should be commended for publishing it."[264] Another female reader advised Kerouac to "write more, shout louder, travel farther before the dreary sinners do us in and it is too late!"[265] Of course, not all women were so enthusiastic. One noted that coverage of the beats by the magazine was "the finest thing I've read about my generation and its cool spawn. Though I understand the hipsters and know quite a few, some warm fluid in my veins keeps me from joining them."[266] The fact that some "warm fluid" prevented this woman from fully participating in the "cool spawn" of hip indicated that some women who professed both an understanding of and experience with bohemians remained ambivalent toward them. However, another woman wrote both an impassioned defense of beatniks and a sharp critique of *Playboy*, both of which stemmed from the "corny publicity

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[264]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, September 1959, 12. Kerouac's essay appeared in the June 1959 issue of *Playboy*.

[265]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, September 1959, 9.

[266]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, June 1958, 5.

gimmick" of the beat playmate.[267] This reader, who "lived in and among the so-called beats" and "fancied myself one, for several years," admitted that "I do dig your magazine" and read it "every month," but "never found anything in it I disagreed with so vehemently as your July Playmate."[268] First, she insisted that while beat women may occasionally forsake bras, "never have I seen a beat chick shed her britches."[269] Further, she had "yet to see a beat drink wine out of a glass that at one time or another didn't hold jelly, peanut butter or a candle," nor did the photographs accompanying the article show "evidence of bongo drums, long black stockings, the essential shark tooth on a chain, or many, many other items no beat could be complete without."[270] Finally, she objected to the depiction of Hollywood coffeehouses such as the Unicorn and Cosmo Alley as "beat hangouts," when "No self-respecting beat could afford an evening there, nor would he want to."[271] This woman criticized misrepresentations of the beat generation on many fronts, yet her chief complaint was not the sexual objectification of women but rather the commercialized stereotypes with which *Playboy* distorted bohemianism in Los Angeles. Not only the insinuation that beat women would readily shed their clothes, but more importantly the visual presentation of upscale environments and expensive commodities

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[267]"Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, October 1959, 8.

[268]Ibid.

[269]Ibid.

[270]Ibid.

[271]Ibid.

that most beats would consider a pathetic waste of money, as well as the utter lack of many of the actual accouterments of beat dress. These letters from female readers who sought both to defend the beat generation and to critique how *Playboy* portrayed it demonstrated that many women felt just as sharp an affinity for bohemia as men.

Overall, newspaper and magazine readers, television viewers and movie critics demonstrated that audiences did not accept mass-media depictions of the beat generation uncritically. While many people agreed with indictments of the beats as lazy, untalented and even morally degenerate, others challenged such interpretations based on their knowledge of bohemians, their own assumptions about postwar America, or their evaluations of the mass media itself. Some audience members dismissed the beat generation entirely, finding no merit whatsoever in beat life or literature, yet many others shared the assumption that American society had become sterile and regimented, even if they thought that the alternatives of the beat generation were untenable. Above all, audience responses demonstrated that many Americans found promise in the beat generation, with its demand that literature not be imprisoned within ivory towers of opaque writing and impenetrable criticism but rather be meaningful for the general public, its insistence that fulfillment and happiness required more (and perhaps were antithetical to) the superficial tranquility of suburbia, and its willingness to enact new ways of daily life that eschewed material comforts in favor of an appreciation for individual potential, however absurd or even destructive all of these efforts might seem. Despite the veneer of disdain and intolerance within which the mass media often

portrayed the beat generation, the attitudes and practices of postwar bohemians resonated for many people in ways that the producers of popular culture neither anticipated nor controlled.

Conclusion

Mass-media representations of the beat generation simultaneously sanitized and amplified the unconventionality of bohemian countercultures. The media often portrayed beatniks through a contradictory binary as either apathetic layabouts or dangerous criminals. Furthermore, magazines such as *Playboy* succeeded in commercializing the beat generation by turning it into stereotypes of slang, dress and demeanor for use in appearing sophisticated at cocktail parties or cruising coffeehouses for casual sex partners. Similarly, television programs like *Route 66* and *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* often reduced postwar bohemianism to the lowest commercial denominator of overwrought superficiality, dispensed in weekly doses of mind numbing aphorisms and inane buffoonery. Finally, most newspaper and magazine coverage of the beat generation was oversimplified at best and grossly distorted at worst, designed to outrage or titillate but rarely to inform. In many cases, the print media adopted a voyeuristic framework and portrayed bohemian districts as arenas in which homosexuality and interracial sex flourished.

Yet such derogatory and commercialized images existed alongside depictions of individuals whose adversarial attitudes challenged postwar norms of consumerism,

homophobia, restrictive gender roles and racial segregation. In its preoccupation with the hangers-on who crowded into cafes and bistros, rather than with a "genuinely" talented intelligentsia, newspapers, magazines and movies suggested that many people who did not identify as poets or painters were attracted to the alternative assumptions, values and ways of life articulated by beat writers. Furthermore, the mass media advertised bohemian districts in Los Angeles and San Francisco as unique arenas in which unconventionality was not only tolerated but encouraged.

Most important, audiences developed their own understandings of the beat generation as it appeared in the mass media. If the readers of newspapers and magazines often renounced the beats, many others affirmed a strong affinity for the countercultures of which beat writers were a part. Moreover, as readers with actual knowledge of life in bohemian districts attested, facile stereotypes about the beat generation by no means exhausted the range of possibilities available in urban countercultures. Even the character of Maynard Krebs, who seemed to represent the wholesale liquidation of bohemian dissent, resonated for some viewers as a validation of their own misgivings about postwar society and an indication that alternatives were possible, however imperfectly or implausibly they appeared in the mass media. In the final analysis, journalists, editors and Hollywood producers who merely sought to exploit the latest fad also helped to popularize a counterculture.

Chapter 2
"Other People Were the Same Way:"
Bohemian Allure and Countercultural Entrepreneurship

Political and cultural iconoclasts of the 1960s often invoked beat generation writers as a pivotal influence. After graduating from high school in 1959, Bob Dylan moved to Minneapolis and enrolled at the University of Minnesota, but spent most of his time in the bohemian district of Dinkytown, where he "just naturally fell in with the beat scene, the Bohemian, BeBop [sic] crowd." Hanging out with musicians and poets, Dylan heard a reading of "Howl" and felt that it "said more to me than any of the stuff I'd been raised on."[1] Other works by Ginsberg, Kerouac, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti "woke me up" and "made perfect sense" at a time when things "of any real value" were "hidden from view."[2] Similarly, in 1960 Tom Hayden hitchhiked from Ann Arbor to Los Angeles to cover the Democratic National Convention for the student newspaper of the University of Michigan, stopping en route in the Bay Area to explore the political activism of Berkeley and the counterculture of North Beach. As someone who was "very influenced by the Beat Generation," Hayden often felt like "an insane beatnik, who would go off on strange tangents and not know what to call that, but I knew that other people were the same way," so "my thing was to hitchhike all over the country in different directions," including Greenwich Village, the Latin Quarter of New Orleans

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[1]Booklet accompanying LP record, Bob Dylan, *Biograph* (Columbia Records, 1985), 5.

[2]Ibid.

and North Beach.[3] For Hayden, Jack Kerouac (along with James Dean and Holden Caulfield) constituted "alternative cultural models beckoning to those of us who in a few years were to become activists."[4] Kerouac expressed "the personal instinct to take risks and journey into an emotional and intellectual wilderness," impelling Hayden to confront "the choices I saw between careerism and idealism."[5] For Hayden and Dylan, beat writers provoked a re-examination of their own lives and the society around them, providing blueprints for new ways of living and thinking.

It was no accident that Hayden and Dylan enacted their affinity for the beat generation by journeying to urban enclaves where writers and artists congregated, for such districts formed the cornerstone of the appeal of bohemian countercultures in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Yet leaders of political movements, rock and roll legends and avant-garde intellectuals were by no means the only people who found the alternative currents of bohemianism alluring, nor was Greenwich Village the only urban area in which such energy abounded. Public interest in bohemian countercultures manifested itself not only in the best-selling works of beat writers and mass-media publicity surrounding beatniks, but moreover in the rapid expansion of urban districts in which writers, artists, intellectuals and those attracted to their ideas and ways of living gathered. On the West Coast, this interest was especially evident in San Francisco and Los

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[3]Tim Findley, "Tom Hayden: Rolling Stone Interview, Part I," *Rolling Stone* 26 October 1972, 38, 40.

[4]Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 17.

[5]Ibid., 19.

Angeles, where bohemian districts experienced a rapid influx of new residents and frequent visitors.

Although many of these newcomers did not identify as writers or artists, they found the allure of bohemia irresistible. The growing number of bars and coffeehouses that featured poetry readings and folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s constituted a proliferation of urban public spaces that validated adversarial assumptions regarding the excesses of consumerism, the monotony of suburban domesticity, the homogenizing effects of the mass media, and the inadequacy of careers that provided ample financial security but little psychological contentment or intellectual stimulation. This chapter argues that bohemian enclaves attracted many people who did not aspire to be poets or painters nor categorically reject careers as bourgeois professionals, but who nonetheless felt a sharp affinity for the unconventional attitudes and behavior that seemed to permeate urban districts where writers, artists and musicians congregated.

The growing number of people who frequented bohemian districts on weekends bolstered the economy of urban countercultures. This chapter also argues that frequent visitors stimulated countercultural entrepreneurship, as bar and coffeehouse owners sought simultaneously to exploit the growing popularity of bohemianism and support artists, poets and musicians in their communities. Some entrepreneurs enticed affluent customers with the chic unconventionality of bohemia, creating café atmospheres in which being "beat" meant sophistication and discernment along with lively conversation and good cappuccino. Others provided free meals to poets and painters or held art

exhibitions and poetry readings. Despite these differences, most bar and coffeehouse owners in bohemian districts hoped to disseminate art, literature and music to broader audiences. Negotiating the dichotomous desire to prosper financially and support avant-garde intellectual life was the crux of countercultural entrepreneurship.

The Growth of Urban Bohemian Districts

The bohemian countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco expanded rapidly in the late 1950s, as the mass media publicized the alternative milieu of districts such as North Beach and Venice, while best-selling works by beat writers popularized the unconventional values of avant-garde intellectuals.[6] Bay Area newspapers reported that "the younger generation flocked to San Francisco to live out the iconoclasm" of Kerouac and Ginsberg.[7] Similarly, in the summer of 1959 a civic leader in L.A. affirmed that people began "pouring into Venice from everywhere" immediately after the publication of *The Holy Barbarians* by Lawrence Lipton, and *Newsweek* concluded that the book "touched off a migration of hundreds of the beat and near-beat into the community."[8] The rapid growth of urban districts such as North Beach and Venice was a key

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[6]For an analysis of how mass-media depictions of the beat generation portrayed postwar bohemianism, see chap. 1 of this dissertation.

[7]Luther Nichols, "Beatniks Leave Bay Area Scene," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 December 1959, sec. 5, p. 7.

[8]Patrick McNulty, "Beatniks and Venice Square Off in Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 1959, no sec., p. 2, "Beatniks" envelope, *Los Angeles Examiner* Collection, University of Southern California (hereafter cited as *Examiner* Collection, USC); "California: Heat on the Beatniks," *Newsweek*, 17 August 1959, 36.

manifestation of increasing public interest in bohemianism.

Estimations of the size of postwar countercultures in San Francisco and Los Angeles varied widely, and often suggested that significant numbers of people who did not identify as poets or painters found enclaves such as North Beach and Venice appealing. *Look* magazine concluded in the summer of 1958 that in North Beach, "the Beat Generation is ridiculously small in numbers (120 'Beatniks' at the most)," and a sociological study found that from the fall of 1958 through the following spring, the "San Francisco Grant Avenue Bohemian community" numbered between 180 and 200.[9] Yet *Life* speculated in November 1959 that the beat generation of San Francisco numbered approximately 1,000.[10] Numbers for southern California also differed, as *Newsweek* calculated in the summer of 1959 that between 500 and 1,000 beats lived in Venice, and that same year *Life* reported that "no fewer than 2,000 Beats" were in L.A., mostly concentrated in Venice.[11] Significantly, estimates by people who resided in bohemian enclaves often distinguished artists and writers from people who did not aspire to be poets or painters. A coffeehouse owner in Venice believed that approximately 4,000 people in L.A. considered themselves beats, about one-tenth of whom were genuinely devoted to

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[9]George B. Leonard, Jr., "The Bored, the Bearded, and the Beat," *Look*, 19 August 1958, 68; Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith, *The Real Bohemia: A Sociological and Psychological Study of the "Beats"* (New York: Basic Books, 1961), 185.

[10]Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life*, 30 November 1959, 129.

[11]"Heat on the Beatniks," 36; O'Neil, 129.

artistic or literary creativity.[12] Similarly, the writer Jerry Kamstra affirmed that "the actual number of individuals who lived in the pads and wrote the poetry" in North Beach was approximately 300, while there were "hundreds of weekenders who came in on Friday night for the action and left late Sunday to go back to their jobs and square scenes."[13] This weekly inflow also occurred in Venice. Sitting in the Venice West Café, poet Stuart Perkoff observed the typical "Friday night crowd of young ultra-hipsters, and old tourists."[14] Thus, an overlapping pattern of influx and exodus characterized bohemian districts. North Beach and Venice attracted new residents who sought intellectual stimulation, sightseers who came for a brief glimpse of the latest fad, and frequent visitors who found certain urban districts appealing but maintained residences and careers in other parts of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The steady inflow of people who came to North Beach and Venice on weekends demonstrated the central role of tourism in stimulating the economies of urban bohemian enclaves. Throughout the mid and late1950s, tourist guides promoted North Beach as the "Latin Quarter" of San Francisco, a place where "artists had homes and studios" and a

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[12]Estimate of coffeehouse owner in Frank Laro, "Beat Generation: New Look," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 1 June 1959, sec. 1, p. 1-2.

[13]Jerry Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950-1980* (no place: Peer Amid Press, 1980), chap. 3, p. 8-9. Pagination for this self-published typescript is incomplete, and thus chapters are cited along with page numbers when available.

[14]Perkoff, journal no. 37, Stuart Z. Perkoff Papers, Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter cited as Perkoff Papers, UCLA).

"whimsical Bohemian atmosphere" abounded.[15] San Francisco newspapers observed that "the beatniks brought droves of tourists into North Beach, tourists with folding green in their wallets," and that such "squares" were "essential" to the "economy of the Beat Generation," as "their regular forays into North Beach have made commercial successes of a half-dozen Beat bars or delicatessens."[16] Similarly, in 1959 the *Los Angeles Mirror News* noted the growing commercialization of the bohemian counterculture of the city, as coffeehouses now attracted "people of middle-age means or wealth, who like coffee, or who think they are 'going slumming' into the world of Bohemia."[17] In short, the disposable income of tourists subsidized the bohemian countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco by sustaining public spaces such as bars and coffeehouses where poets, painters and musicians gathered.

Moreover, in providing an economic foundation for urban spaces in which avant-garde intellectuals congregated, tourism stimulated public cultures in L.A. and San Francisco for people who empathized with the unconventional assumptions and practices

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[15]*Your Guide to San Francisco and Its Nearby Vacationlands* (San Francisco: Californians, Inc., 1957), 6; *Guest Informant: The 1960-61 Mark Hopkins Hotel Edition* (Los Angeles: Pacific Hotel Publications, 1960), n. p.

[16]June Muller, "Most Merchants Glad They're Gone," *San Francisco Examiner*, 6 August 1962, no sec., p. 18, "Cafes" envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings Morgue, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library (hereafter cited as *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC); Allen Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," *This World* (Sunday magazine supplement of *San Francisco Chronicle*), 22 June 1958, 6.

[17]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home on Coast," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 20 June 1958, sec. 1, p. 4.

of poets, painters and musicians but did not identify as writers or artists.[18] Describing people who frequented North Beach but lived in other parts of the Bay Area, the *San Francisco Chronicle* observed that "their interest has earned for them the Beat nickname of 'Week-End Bohemians,'" meaning those who were "not willing to make such a complete break" with conventional life as writers and artists but preferred instead to hold well-paying jobs and reside in other parts of the city.[19] However, the *Chronicle* distinguished between these frequent visitors and tourists, observing that "the Week-End Bohemian, seeking to conform, dresses to conform" when in bohemia, but that "the tourist in North Beach, as opposed to the Week-End Bohemian," came "to watch the Beatniks, not to join them."[20] While the *Chronicle* derided frequent visitors who sought to blend in among residents without being recognized as outsiders, it also highlighted the middle ground that existed between the polarities of avant-garde intellectuals dedicated to artistic creativity and sightseers who made brief excursions to bohemian districts and never returned. While bohemian countercultures attracted both camera-wielding tourists

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[18]As Nan Alamilla Boyd argues, North Beach nightclubs that featured male and female cross-dressing performers and drew heterosexual audiences functioned as public arenas in which homosexuals could interact in environments that validated the transgression of norms governing sexual attraction and gender-appropriate behavior. Thus, sex tourism in commercialized urban spaces created public cultures for homosexuals. See Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chap. 1, especially 52-53. On the overlap between homosexual and bohemian cultures in San Francisco and Los Angeles, see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[19]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6.

[20]Ibid.

and "serious" writers and artists, the majority of people drawn to Venice and North Beach were in between these two extremes: although they had no desire to become great poets or painters, they regarded bohemian districts as far more than brief stops on a vacation itinerary. These weekend bohemians formed a key component of urban countercultures in Los Angeles and San Francisco, not only in their economic role as customers of bars and coffeehouses but also in their genuine affinity for the adversarial potential that seemed to permeate districts such as North Beach and Venice.[21]

[21]The sociologist Erik Cohen posits five modes of tourist experience, two of which are relevant to understanding "weekend bohemians." In the "experiential" mode, people who are increasingly conscious of their alienation from modern society attempt to find meaning through vicarious experience (for example, people who travel to a sacred religious site of another culture and observe indigenous pilgrims who journey to the site as a rite of their own faith). In the "experimental" mode, individuals not only observe but actively participate in alternative ways of life for brief periods of time (for example, people who live for a short duration on a hippie commune or an Israeli kibbutz and then return to more conventional ways of living and working). See Cohen, "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology* 13 (May 1979): 186-189. Weekend bohemians engaged in both experiential and experimental tourism, frequenting urban districts in which they directly or indirectly participated in and gained a broader understanding of alternative ways of life. Furthermore, as Kevin J. Mumford argues in his study of urban sex districts in the early twentieth century, both avant-garde intellectuals and white middle-class slummers often shared an affinity for the oppositional behavior (such as interracial sex and homosexuality) that they encountered in certain metropolitan enclaves. See Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), particularly chap. 8. Weekend visitors to North Beach and Venice, like the avant-garde intellectuals who resided there, felt a sharp attraction to and empathy for the invigorating attitudes and practices that seemed to permeate urban bohemian enclaves, and thus they returned to such districts on a regular basis.

Coming to Bohemia

The allure of bohemian countercultures centered on a desire to overcome the alienating character of postwar social life. Throughout the 1950s, conformity and alienation were widely regarded as central components of American life. Intellectuals such as David Riesman, William Whyte, Daniel Boorstin, Paul Goodman, Daniel Bell, Vance Packard, and Dwight Macdonald criticized the stifling effects of economic prosperity, particularly the standardization of tastes in a consumer culture and the extent to which both white and blue collar workers were forced to do highly repetitive and unrewarding tasks.[22] Significantly, such criticism was not confined to the limited

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[22]See Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), particularly chap. 4. On the role of Cold War anti-Communism and consumerism in valorizing traditional gender roles within middle-class families in the postwar years, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basis Books, 1988). For interpretations that challenge the reputed conservatism of the 1950s, see William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Joel Foreman, ed., *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); and Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Essentially, I endorse both strains in the historiography of the 1950s. The conformist tendencies of the decade should not be overstated, and many valuable studies highlight more invigorating and dynamic features of postwar society. Yet this scholarship should not obscure the significance of countervailing forces at work throughout the decade or extent to which the pressure to conform politically and culturally was a pervasive feature of American life in the 1950s. For an excellent assessment of how the alienation of the postwar years contributed to the radicalism of the 1960s, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in*

readerships of journals like *Partisan Review* or *The New Republic*, as Riesman, Whyte, Boorstin, Goodman and Packard all produced best-selling accounts of the disaffection and ossification that seemed to plague postwar society. Like these critics, many Americans admired signs of idiosyncrasy and uninhibited self-expression in a cultural landscape that often appeared mundane. For some individuals, bohemian enclaves provided an antidote to postwar conformity. Like avant-garde painters and poets, people who moved to or frequented North Beach and Venice appreciated the extent to which these districts validated alternatives that seemed in short supply elsewhere.

Some people gravitated to bohemian enclaves because they sought the fellowship of other writers and artists or wanted to experience the alternative ways of living and thinking portrayed in seminal literary works. Jerry Kamstra considered North Beach to be a "community of creative people" and "a proving ground" for those who "follow the vision of the artist," a "place to find out if you have anything" intellectually.[23] Similarly, Stuart Perkoff found that creative inspiration was "so vitally a part of being in Venice," where he could read his poems publicly and know that "my sound does have a relevance" for "other writers."[24] Yet if some people gravitated toward bohemian enclaves because of what they hoped to write, many more came because of what they read. One young woman left her "smart sorority in a smart little midwestern university" because Oscar

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America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[23]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 1, p. 13-14 and introduction, p. 1.

[24]Perkoff, journal nos. 8 and 31, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

Wilde "really shook me up."[25] She read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "bought a bus ticket the next day" for San Francisco.[26] Her boyfriend, who settled in North Beach after hitchhiking across the country, affirmed that "Kerouac told me what kind of man I wanted to be."[27] He did not elaborate but cited a famous passage from *On the Road* about people who are "mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time."[28] That Kerouac could tell people "what kind of man" to be demonstrated that the urgent pursuit of personal fulfillment and rewarding experiences so often found in beat literature was directly relevant for many readers. Moreover, while neither of these individuals identified themselves as poets or painters, they understood the power of art, literature and ideas to validate unconventional attitudes and catalyze a desire to live in more stimulating environments and interact with people who shared similar assumptions.

The ability of literature to provoke new ways of thinking among aspiring writers and restless college students was not the only cause of the growth of bohemian enclaves, as many people gravitated to Venice and North Beach after abandoning careers that were financially rewarding but intellectually and psychologically debilitating. One Venice resident gave up a profitable job in advertising because "I hated everything I was doing

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[25]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 15 June 1958, 6.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957; reprint: New York: Penguin, 1976), 8.

and everybody connected with it."[29] He realized that "nothing is so frustrating as to discover that you can do better than other people at the things you have the most contempt for," and "*look* the part" that he so despised, gaining superficial acceptance among colleagues while reviling the selfishly opportunistic attitudes fostered by the professional climate in which he worked.[30] Yet even this perfunctory acceptance was temporary, either because "I'd get fed up again with the whole thing" or his employers would "get wise to me, because you can't live that kind of a lie, keep up pretenses–false pretenses, really–for very long."[31] Another young man graduated from Yale, renounced his "very Boston," "very Back Bay" family, and abandoned a promising career in public relations to avoid the fate of his father, who attained financial success but had "no joy, no fun, no life."[32] This individual sensed a "terrible, dragging conformity" that made people content with "getting married and moving to the suburbs and tithing their lives to General Motors."[33] Finding such a scenario untenable, he "got with it in New York" and then started "making this Beat scene," spending three years in the French Quarter of New Orleans and then moving to San Francisco.[34] Significantly, Greenwich Village was not

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[29]Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), 48.

[30]Ibid., emphasis in original.

[31]Ibid., 45.

[32]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 5-6.

[33]Ibid., 6.

[34]Ibid., 5.

the only urban district that attracted people with an interest in countercultural alternatives, as this person "got with it" in Manhattan but spent years in bohemian enclaves in the southern and western United States. Furthermore, colleagues in advertising and public relations might scoff at relinquishing financially advantageous careers in favor of more psychologically rewarding ways of life, but these two individuals believed to the contrary that the decisions they made were the only viable options.

Yet as bohemians confronted the opportunities and limitations of postwar economic prosperity, they did not restrict themselves to the polarities of full engagement versus absolute refusal, to choosing between a financially rewarding career with a suburban tract home or a cramped studio and a life devoted to art and introspection. Rather, many people navigated a middle course by participating in both the countercultures of Venice and North Beach and the broader economies of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Lipton believed that such people were prevalent in Venice, concluding that "out of perhaps a hundred beatniks," one may be a poet or painter while "the other ninety-nine are not artists. They chose 'the life' because they like it better than what Squareville has to offer."[35] One such woman lived in Venice and worked at a law firm in Beverly Hills, explaining that "at the office, I work" but "here I live."[36] This was "like having one foot on each side of the tracks," but "that's the only way I can make it."[37]

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[35]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 308.

[36]Ibid., 103.

[37]Ibid.

Contemplating her attraction to Venice, she observed that "it isn't art or intellectualism, it isn't genius that got me hooked. It's the life."[38] While much of Los Angeles seemed a world in which "last year's car is out of style before you finish paying for the tail fins," in Venice she could "get away from it for a while, at least evenings and week ends," and "do *without* things," with "nobody to show off for" and no need to "keep up with anybody."[39] Pondering the significance of residing in the district, she exclaimed "God!–do you know what a relief that is?"[40] Few urban juxtapositions symbolized the dichotomy of conspicuous consumerism versus bohemian unconventionality more than Beverly Hills and Venice, and this woman had no illusions about the contradictory nature of her existence. She did not reveal her place of residence to coworkers but told them she lived in nearby Santa Monica, which "sounds respectable" and thus "nobody suspects anything."[41] Working and living in two very different economic and cultural environments enabled this individual to attain financial security and incorporate countercultural values in her daily life. In short, as with the writers and artists who resided in Venice, this woman believed that the district validated attitudes and ways of life that were far more difficult to sustain in other parts of Los Angeles.

If the search for such alternatives led some individuals to travel cross country or

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[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., emphasis in original.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

settle permanently in North Beach and Venice, many more people in Los Angeles and San Francisco made weekly journeys from suburbs and residential neighborhoods to bohemian districts. While some frequent visitors regarded North Beach and Venice as little more than trendy hot spots, many others believed that these enclaves validated their own unconventional beliefs. A stenographer who lived in Sausalito (just north of San Francisco) acknowledged that "it takes me almost as long to get myself ready for North Beach–to be properly sloppy in my smart little black outfit and to comb my hair just right over my eyes–as it would to get ready for a date on Nob Hill."[42] For this woman, North Beach was essentially an entertainment zone that had unique codes of appearance but little more to distinguish it from other popular districts. In North Beach, "sloppy" easily became the latest fashion accessory to be prominently displayed. Yet another woman felt a more substantive affinity for North Beach. She worked as a nurse and lived in an upscale section of San Francisco but frequented North Beach because "I don't like being told by Madison Avenue what I should think and what I should buy and who I should vote for. Sometimes it's hard to be independent when you're living on Pacific Heights. There are times when you feel the pressure they are putting on you to make you like and think like everyone else."[43] When this happened, "I come into North Beach," and "after a

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[42]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6. On the valorization of both the way objects and individuals appeared and the actual act or process of looking and watching in the 1950s–what this woman referred to as being "properly sloppy"–see Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[43]Ibid.

few hours listening to the Beatniks–they're against *everything*, you know–it's easy for me to go home and live with my quiet little protests."[44] This woman frequented North Beach because the area confirmed her belief that people must strive to remain autonomous individuals amidst the standardizing effects of advertising and the mass media. She found in North Beach an affirmation of her own life choices: she had no desire to "go all the way with the Beat Generation" and give up a steady job that she enjoyed, yet she felt an affinity for the bohemian valorization of individuality and autonomy.[45] If some weekend visitors essentially sought to pose amidst the latest fad, many others experienced a genuine empathy for the alternative attitudes and assumptions that pervaded bohemian enclaves. The issue was not where people resided or what career they chose but rather how they defined fulfillment and happiness, navigated pressures to conform to the expectations of others, and confronted pervasive codes of behavior. For many frequent visitors, bohemian districts provided environments in which to explore adversarial ways of thinking and living, explorations that often reinforced their own attitudes.

Many people who felt little appreciation for avant-garde painting and poetry came to bohemian enclaves because of the music they heard there. A Berkeley student who frequented North Beach in the early 1950s asserted that folk music "was absolutely central" in bringing him and his friends to bars like the Tin Angel, because "all of us

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

loved folk music, it was everywhere" in the district.[46] In southern California, the writer Lionel Rolfe recalled that "like so many Westside Los Angeles youngsters in the '50s, I had spent my weekend evenings in and around the old Venice West scene," although "the poetry, the existentialism, the globs of paint on cheap masonite paintings, all these artifacts of beatnik culture meant little to me."[47] Far more enticing was "the lewd, pulsating rhythm of jazz," which Rolfe considered "the hallmark of my memories of what I think of today as my great old Bohemian days," when "the lure of jazz and coffee houses" felt irresistible.[48] If frequent visitors found little value in the abstract expressionist painting or the avant-garde poetry in North Beach and Venice, they often shared with writers and artists an interest in jazz and folk music that brought them to these enclaves on a regular basis.

Some visitors found the poetry they heard and the paintings they saw in bohemian districts not merely unappealing but disconcerting, yet they frequented North Beach and Venice in order to escape the monotony of surrounding metropolitan landscapes. James Peck, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Examiner* (a paper that rarely found any redeeming

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[46]Erwin Kelly, "Gay Life at Berkeley in the 1950s: 'Miss Scarlett, I Don't Know Nothin' about Bein' Gay!'" oral history transcript, interviewed by William Benemann, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 25. On the popularity of folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Richie Unterberger, *Turn! Turn! Turn! The '60s Folk-rock Revolution* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), chap. 1.

[47]Lionel Rolfe, "The Great Coffee Houses of Los Angeles: Where the Beat Went On," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 21 October 1979, *California Living* sec., p. 21.

[48]Ibid. On jazz in postwar California, see Ted Gioia, *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California, 1945-1960* (1992; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

qualities in bohemians) frequented the Gas House in Venice despite feeling that "I don't understand the music, I don't dig much of the art or poetry, and I can never seem to find anybody out there who will agree with me about anything at all."[49] While he lacked an understanding of or agreement with the denizens of the Gas House, Peck "regularly dropped in every month," whenever he "needed some reassurance about the magnificent differences between human beings. After an hour of television, say, or a drive through Lakewood," a suburban development in southern L.A. County that was twice the size of Levittown.[50] Visitors like Peck felt simultaneously out of place and at home in bohemian enclaves: although they found little merit in avant-garde art or jazz, the general atmosphere confirmed their appreciation of unconventional attitudes and behavior that seemed in short supply in many other parts of Los Angeles.

The Multifaceted Milieu of Bohemian Enclaves

People who "don't dig much of the art or poetry," who opted for "quiet little protests" and had "one foot on each side of the tracks" often elicited bitter contempt from those who considered themselves both avant-garde intellectuals and bonafide nonconformists. Indeed, many writers and artists who lived in North Beach and Venice before the beat generation made headlines thought that new residents and frequent

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[49]Peck, "Vive La Difference," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 19 February 1961, no sec., n. p., "Eric Nord" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[50]Ibid. On the suburban municipality of Lakewood, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1992), 165-166.

visitors were intellectually vacuous and politically apathetic. Writers and artists rarely invoked "authenticity" overtly when making such criticism, but their tacit assumption was that the newcomers were not authentically bohemian.[51] The most frequent criticism was that weekenders failed to appreciate both that art and poetry were vital vocations and that Venice and North Beach were communities of avant-garde creativity. Yet new residents and frequent visitors, like avant-garde intellectuals, often believed that commodity consumption failed to elicit the benefits promised by advertising, that the mass media encouraged the standardization of thought and expression, and that financially rewarding careers rarely provided intellectual stimulation or meaningful relationships with colleagues. In accepting these core assumptions, newcomers were just as authentic as anyone else who felt an affinity for the bohemian milieu: dedicated poets

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[51]This sentiment pervades scholastic interpretations of the beat generation, which often posit sharp distinctions between authentic beat intellectuals and beatnik posers. Historian William L. O'Neill asserts that by the late 1950s, the coffeehouses of North Beach "were populated by 'beatniks' who strove to be 'cool' and 'hip' in the approved manner," while "the Beats were deeply committed" to literary creativity. See O'Neill, *American High*, 242-243. Warren French thunders that "the beatniks were the worst thing that happened to the beats" and strives to "downplay the overpublicized antics of the transient beatniks and to focus attention upon the work of those 'serious and ambitious' artists who were championed by genuinely concerned avant-garde" intellectuals. See French, *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, 1955-1960* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), xix-xx. Such disdain does little to further our understanding of how bohemianism gained significance outside of avant-garde cadres. While many weekenders did not aspire to be great writers, they were "genuinely concerned" with surmounting the conformist tendencies of postwar society that poets like Ginsberg so compellingly critiqued. From the perspective of social and cultural history, the newcomers mattered most, for their presence demonstrated that the assumptions and ways of life of avant-garde intellectuals resonated far beyond the "serious and ambitious" coteries that scholars like French wish to celebrate.

and weekend visitors both valued North Beach and Venice as communities that not only tolerated but encouraged unconventional thinking and behavior, however much each group differed in expressing or enacting this appreciation. Furthermore, "genuine" writers and artists were ambiguous regarding what constituted bohemian authenticity and why newcomers lacked it. While poets and painters often criticized frequent visitors for failing to appreciate art and literature and limiting themselves to weekend sojourns, this criticism was by no means uniform, as writers and artists displayed substantial ambivalence concerning the growing popularity of bohemianism.[52]

When bohemian enclaves became more popular as tourist destinations, some writers and artists exploited slummers for their own benefit. Of course, some weekend visitors tried to avoid looking conspicuously out of place. One Berkeley student frequented the Black Cat with fraternity brothers but noted that "the people I took were always people carefully screened" because "I did not want to look like we were tourists."[53] Other visitors were not so cautious, which often made them easy targets for the more aggressive members of the literati. An example of the latter was Bob Kaufman, an African American poet widely regarded as one of the most boisterous personalities in

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[52]On authenticity, Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); and Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

[53]Kelly, "Gay Life at Berkeley," 5.

North Beach. His wife Eileen recalled hanging out in the Coffee Gallery, where Bob "would speak spontaneously on any subject, quote great poetry by Lorca, T.S. Eliot, ee cummings, or himself," while "tourists were delighted to buy a pitcher of beer, bottle of champagne, or anything we wanted–just to be a part of the Life emanating from our table."[54] Eileen believed that the typical tourist "knew that *something* groovy was going on, and he would *buy* his was into it, by God, if he couldn't get in any other way!"[55] Kaufman was conscious of his status as café entertainment, and he often turned this against tourists themselves. One North Beach denizen recalled an occasion when Kaufman held forth in the Coffee Gallery: "People were buying him drinks as fast as he could say anything," and "As soon as somebody bought him a drink he would insult them."[56] Here, racial exoticism intersected with countercultural tourism, as predominantly white middle-class slummers enjoyed the dual spectacle of an ostentatious and irreverent poet who was both beat and black. Indeed, some whites found North Beach fascinating precisely because they could appropriate the racially mixed nightlife of the district for their own entertainment. Yet the appropriation at work here was reciprocal, as Kaufman deftly used his status as a local celebrity simultaneously to

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[54]Eileen Kaufman, "From *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers*?" in Brenda Knight, ed., *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1996), 113.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Tattoo Bob Murphy, qtd. in David Henderson, "Introduction," in Gerald Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar: Selected Poems by Bob Kaufman* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1996), 12.

manipulate and condemn white tourists.[57]

Older bohemians often criticized their younger counterparts for being apathetic and withdrawn.[58] A bohemian in Los Angeles praised the beats for their "withdrawal from the rat race" but condemned them because "they haven't even attempted to change or correct society, but have simply withdrawn" into a purely "cultural effort."[59] Similarly, the writer and Bay Area resident William Everson insisted that "other generations of revolt," including "we anarchists," sought to "set up a counter-institutional world," but the typical beatnik believed that such efforts were "entrapped in the world of the square" and thus "refuses to have any real dialogue with the world of the square, and this to me is fatal."[60] One North Beach denizen recalled that "'Beatnik' was a dirty word" because

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[57]The scholarship on white fascination with and appropriation of African American culture is voluminous, but see especially Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); George Lipsitz, "White Desire: Remembering Robert Johnson," in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Greg Tate, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003). On white bohemians' appropriation and misunderstanding of black culture in the postwar decades, see Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997). On the racial dynamics of bohemian countercultures in Los Angeles and San Francisco in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[58]On the generational cohorts among postwar bohemians, see the introduction to this dissertation.

[59]Laro, "'Beat' Crowd Crowded," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 3 June 1959, sec. 3, p. 5.

[60]"The Beat Friar," *Time*, 25 May 1959, 61.

"We considered ourselves pre-beat bohemians," people who "did not want to be bothered by the outside world" and thus loathed the tourists and journalists who constantly sought a glimpse of the beat generation. [61] In essence, older "pre-beat" bohemians held newcomers to contradictory and virtually impossible standards of authenticity: they should appreciate art and literature but not wallow in merely "cultural" work, eschew the rat race but not withdraw from society completely, and engage in "dialogue" with squares but not bring excessive attention from the outside world.

Moreover, some writers and artists displayed ambivalence toward newcomers, simultaneously loathing their bohemian pretensions yet admiring the fact that more people now seemed to challenge conformity. Jerry Kamstra arrived in North Beach in 1957 and castigated the avalanche of migrants who appeared shortly after he did. Walking through the district, he saw the "just arrived hipsters from Des Moines and Detroit" along with "Salvation Army-clad desperados," while "old-timers on the set, that is, those who'd been there for more than a month, ignored this" inundation as best they could.[62] By the early 1960s, "a whole new phalanx of hangers-on and hangers-around drifted in, ripoff dudes and ersatz fugitives from nowhere," people who were "not interested in any community of ideas, not having any ideas really, except those that the newspapers put in their heads."[63] Kamstra reserved his greatest contempt for frequent

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[61] Mark Green, *"A Kind of Beatness:" Photographs of a North Beach Era, 1950-1965* (San Francisco: Focus Galleries/East Wind Printers, 1975), 5.

[62]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4, p. 45-46.

[63]Ibid., 49.

visitors, insisting that "the True Bohemian is no part-time bohemian, he is no Sunday bohemian, into the alleys and art for the weekend and then back out to the job and security," but rather "the True Bohemian is a full-time bohemian, a bohemian by nature, despite himself, born into it as the artist always must be."[64] Yet Kamstra also believed that "what Kerouac did was speak the truth to a whole generation," and that "for a lot of people working at dull jobs with dull futures, it wasn't difficult recognizing that the Beats knew something they didn't, so they took a closer look at their own lives."[65] The result was that "whole hordes of discontents, whole armies of intrepid hipster artists" went "out on the road," many of them headed for North Beach.[66] In sum, Kamstra tried to balance two contradictory judgements regarding the growing public interest in bohemianism: he wanted to preserve a sense of intimate intellectual exchange among aspiring writers and artists, yet he prized the extent to which literature could spark new ways of thinking and living among readers and inspire them to make the same migration to North Beach that he did. Stuart Perkoff expressed a similar ambivalence. He was outraged when a fellow poet gave a reading at a Venice coffeehouse to people who seemed incapable of appreciating literature. He felt "slightly ill to hear such good verses" read to a chattering audience that viewed poetry readings as "just one of the sights and sounds of a Friday night in Venice," rather than appreciating such readings as "serious and wonder-filled

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[64]Ibid., chap. 8, n.p.

[65]Ibid., chap. 1, p. 16, 20.

[66]Ibid., 19.

events" that demanded their undivided attention.[67] During a jazz-poetry performance, Perkoff found a "mob of people" and their "bad vibrations," yet after reading his verses he "was very conscious of the impact on the listeners," whose "stunned openness" impressed him considerably.[68] Furthermore, he found it difficult to "get used to hearing jazz all over" the radio but hoped that this was a "good indication of the cultural change that we're involved in."[69] Feeling an intense bond with the poets and painters of Venice and sensing that the growing popularity of the district might be one indication of a more fundamental cultural transformation, Perkoff simultaneously empathized with and railed against the influx of new residents and frequent visitors. In sum, for intellectuals who regarded North Beach and Venice primarily as communities of creativity, the arrival of people who failed to demonstrate a proper respect for art, literature and the exchange of ideas was disturbing. Yet such disdain was not absolute, as some writers and artists exhibited ambivalence regarding the expanding countercultures of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

If some bohemians expressed contradictory responses to the influx of newcomers, individuals who identified as beats often believed that new arrivals heralded an invigoration of American culture that necessarily resonated beyond intellectual coteries. One North Beach poet and self-identified "Beat nonconformist" believed that weekend

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[67]Perkoff, journal no. 37, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[68]Perkoff, journal no. 5, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[69]Perkoff, journal no. 31, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

bohemians "usually are highly literate, thinking people" who "held steady jobs all their lives, making payments on their new cars, getting all hung up with child psychology and income taxes and fancy clothes," people who did "their best to live the kind of lives someone else says they *should* live," only now "they've begun to wonder whether the rat race is really worth it."[70] For this individual, such "growing unrest is encouraging."[71] If some avant-garde intellectuals scoffed at newcomers, other bohemians appreciated the extent to which their own attitudes and behavior now influenced "squares" who sought their own ways of fighting pressures to conform. Furthermore, self-described beatniks often had very broad understandings of who the beat generation encompassed. A 30 year-old female folksinger in Venice affirmed that "a Beatnik, very simply, is a person who does what he wants to do," an "individualist," meaning anyone "who's happy in what he's doing, no matter what it is."[72] Such people did not have to reside in Venice nor be artists or writers, but on the contrary could include "a stockbroker or an ad man," and even the proverbial man content to "wear a gray flannel suit."[73] The bottom line for this woman was that "it's wrong for people to conform and do things they're not happy

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[70]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6, emphasis in original.

[71]Ibid.

[72]"Singer 'Sounds' Beatnik Views," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 20 September 1959, no sec., n.p., "Lawrence Lipton" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[73]Ibid.

doing," and she insisted "that's the kind of Beatnik I am."[74] This inclusiveness indicated that the habitues of North Beach and Venice were not as insular as either some observers charged or as they themselves occasionally seemed when pondering the influx of newcomers. In short, people who considered themselves beats often believed that both new residents and weekend visitors shared their own adversarial assumptions and were just as welcome in these urban countercultures as the most dedicated poets, painters and musicians.

A key reason for such acceptance was the multifaceted character of social life in bohemian enclaves, a quality that impressed even the most dedicated artists and writers. While some individuals spoke of "the scene," there was in fact a limitless web of pads, lofts, bars and coffeehouses in which a variety of people congregated at different times. The African American painter Arthur Monroe recalled that "the underground was a vast retreat to networks of enclaves in the various studios of artists," and Kamstra believed that "the Beat Renaissance was really a crazy melange of a hundred different scenes" in which "each new caravan of drifters" formed new "cadres."[75] Even Perkoff recognized that Venice contained a variety of interdependent scenes, cliques and subgroups. Contemplating those that resonated for him, including "the dope scene," the regulars at the Venice West Café and most especially "the many strongly creative people and

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[74]Ibid.

[75]Monroe, "The Decade of Bebop, Beatniks, and Painting," 1998, http://www.somarts.org/beat/beat_text.html, p. 1, accessed from the internet 28 July 2002; Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4, p. 47-48.

activities," Perkoff realized that "I am not the only person whose natural scene included these, and many others, within their real world, each part integral" to the "structure" as a whole.[76] Indeed, Perkoff noted that he could not "make this sort of simple listing" of his favorite people and hangouts with "any pretense of accurate categorizing."[77] In short, writers and artists often understood that a wide array of individuals and cohorts made up the broader bohemian milieux of Venice and North Beach, and that however much they might privilege dedicated poets and painters, such individuals formed small parts of much larger subcultures.

Moreover, North Beach and Venice contained variegated networks of public and private spaces whose overlapping yet distinct character enabled individuals to participate selectively in bohemian countercultures, regardless of where they resided or what profession they chose. Even "serious" poets and painters often limited their engagement in the social life of bohemian enclaves. A sociological study of the beat generation in North Beach concluded that the most "earnest artists," those who were "steady" and "reliable" in their creative work, chose to "'make the scene,' but pace themselves," and "their fellow Bohemians do not ostracize them for this."[78] The study labeled one female poet "a seven-day 'week-end Bohemian,'" someone who "makes the scene (lives in the area, has tried marijuana, has had sexual relationships with other Bohemians)" but "keeps

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[76]Perkoff, journal no. 8, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 102-103.

her distance" from other North Beach habitues despite being "fairly well-known and popular" among them.[79] The study also noted a poet who was "clean shaven, neat," wore "dark business suits" and "makes the scene, but does not wallow in it."[80] In short, weekend visitors were not the only people who selectively embraced bohemianism: even among the intellectuals who resided in North Beach, wide disparities existed in the frequency of their engagement with the social life of the district. In Venice, one man had a wife, three children and a job at an aerospace factory, yet Lipton concluded that his position among the writers and artists of the district was "ambiguous but secure on the whole."[81] This man held parties at his home, "which comes as close to being a pad as family life with children will permit," and he "makes the marijuana scene on week ends [sic]."[82] He "might show up at work a little woozy on Monday mornings and miss a day occasionally, but he manages to hold onto his job."[83] While this individual occupied an "ambiguous" position, being partially in but not entirely of the countercultural milieu, the more salient point was that his place among the bohemians of Venice was also "secure," in that he could participate in some aspects of the local counterculture and yet maintain his family and career without having to chose between two seemingly mutually exclusive

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[79]Ibid., 116.

[80]Ibid., 100.

[81]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 53.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid.

ways of life. Despite the tendency of intellectuals and journalists to ridicule "weekend bohemians" as beatnik posers, most of the people who found North Beach and Venice compelling did not identify as writers or artists, yet they often found acceptance among those who did.

One catalyst for this acceptance was the tendency of bohemians to view everyday life and the structure of quotidian existence as forms of artistic endeavor and expression. One Venice resident explained his affinity for the bohemian milieu by insisting that "you don't have to be an artist" because "the goal is to make living an art, to be honest and truthful with yourself and other people."[84] Even Kamstra believed that the denizens of North Beach were "artists all, in one way or another," a group of "fellow travelers" who sought new ways of living and creating.[85] This willingness to attach artistic significance to the everyday idiosyncracies available in urban countercultures revealed that bohemians valued individuality and uninhibited expression not merely in poetry and painting but in all aspects of life. Photographer Charles Brittin reflected on the L.A. art scene and observed that "many people in that world weren't required to have any great talent to be accepted; their beauty was enough."[86] Many writers and artists evaluated individuals

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[84]Don Neff, "Beatniks' Search Leads to a Life of Squalor," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 1962, sec. 2, p. 10.

[85]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 1, p. 13, and Kamstra, "Part Fact, Part Fiction," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 11 May 1975, no sec., n.p., "Kamstra, Jerry–Activist, Etc." envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[86]Kristine McKenna, "Way Out West: A Conversation with Charles Brittin," in *Charles Brittin* (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1999), 15.

based not on their creative potential but rather on how they interacted with others, what they valued in life and how they implemented those values on a daily basis. Furthermore, even self-identified bohemians like Kamstra recognized that countercultural authenticity was as much an ideal as a reality. Kamstra recalled that "being fake in those days wasn't sinful," because "we were all young and part of finding out who you were was being fake part of the time."[87] In short, dedicated writers and artists could preen and pose just as fervently as slummers from the suburbs. Moreover, Kamstra observed that "as anyone who has spent any time in a bohemian community can tell you, there are usually a bunch of nuts running around," but in North Beach "we were all nuts at one time or another, made crazy by the freedom and tolerance and general good-natured camaraderie of the place."[88] The "essence provided by a bohemian community" encompassed "a wildness, an abandon, a lack of formality, and the very 'craziness' the newspapers decried," all of which "allowed a person to find himself."[89] Although some individuals posited sharp distinctions between "serious" artists and beatnik pretenders, others recognized that bohemian enclaves attracted an ample amount of both types plus many more, all of whom intermingled in various ways within the broader social world of bohemia (intellectuals such as Kamstra and Perkoff expressed both viewpoints). In sum, these overlapping networks of intellectual coteries, longtime residents, new arrivals and frequent visitors

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[87]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4, p. 41.

[88]Ibid., chap. 1, p. 13.

[89]Ibid., 14.

enabled a broad mixture of people to develop widely varying but personally meaningful forms of engagement with the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Religious Life among Bohemians

One important indication of the variegated character of bohemian countercultures was religion. In 1958, a mission of the Congregational Church opened in North Beach, under the auspices of Pierre Delattre, a minister with a remarkably unorthodox religiosity. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania as an English major, Delattre earned a degree at the University of Chicago Divinity School, was ordained by the Presbyterian Church, and later moved to the Bay Area, where he helped develop a program in religion and contemporary culture at the University of California at Berkeley.[90] There he concluded that "the most exciting people in student life and the most dynamic [individuals] I met elsewhere wouldn't come near the church."[91] As a writer with three unpublished novels and a minister willing to go beyond overtly religious settings to find "exciting" and "dynamic" people, he gravitated toward North Beach, finding "tremendous vitality" and "a kind of acceptance that made freedom possible."[92] After hanging out in the bars and cafes of the district, Delattre decided that the Presbyterian Church should establish coffeehouses of its own, and when he learned that

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[90]"Far-Out Mission," *Time*, 29 June 1959, 38.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid.

the Congregational Board of Home Missions was considering such an experiment, he became a Congregationalist. Placing little importance on his ecclesiastical affiliation, Delattre affirmed that "I'm not denominationally inclined."[93] Sharing with many North Beach denizens the belief that "the main stream [sic] of American culture was sick," he believed that the district was an excellent locale for his unorthodox ministry.[94] Thus North Beach legitimized the unconventional attitudes of Delattre concerning postwar society in general and religion in particular. As with many newcomers, he found the district conducive to new ways of thinking.

Delattre faced a formidable challenge, given the extraordinary range of religious belief among bohemians in the district. Most of those who expressed a concern with religion developed inordinately eclectic and highly personalized forms of faith. A sociological study of the beat generation in North Beach found that "a few" people identified themselves without qualification or explanation as Buddhists, while a "tiny minority" did so as Christians, usually Protestants.[95] Yet most of those who affirmed religious belief stipulated either a specific intellectual tradition within, or an idiosyncratic understanding of, broader theological systems. One female folk singer called herself a "Martin Buber, Catholic existentialist," while a man labeled himself a "modified Zen Buddhist" and another noted that "I synthesized my beliefs from Maimonides" (a twelfth-

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[93]Ibid.

[94]Muller, "Most Merchants," p. 18.

[95]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 38.

century Jewish theologian and philosopher).[96] Another man called himself a "devout but heretical Catholic" and explained that "my belief in God is really very irrational, but it is much more valuable to me for this very reason."[97] This adherence to "modified," "synthesized" and even "heretical" and "irrational" variants of established religions suggested that some bohemians formulated highly introspective and intellectualized forms of faith, linking philosophies and theologies very closely to their own experiences, assumptions and interests. Yet others eschewed the unorthodox for the eclectic. One individual affirmed that "my belief is a synthesis from all religions," while a female writer labeled herself a "pantheist" who believed that "God is everywhere, in everything."[98] One man blended the spiritual and the natural, asserting that "I have no religious ties other than nature itself. Nature is my religion. The beauty of nature above all things."[99] For these people, religion centered not on philosophy, theology or elaborate belief systems but rather on awareness and perception, a desire to find a spiritual dimension in oneself and the world. Overall, North Beach bohemians crafted very disparate forms of religious belief, using their eclectic intellectual interests and psychological predispositions to create meaningful forms of spirituality.

Yet many bohemians in North Beach professed no religious faith at all. Beat

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[96]Ibid., 36, 103.

[97]Ibid., 100, 103.

[98]Ibid., 36.

[99]Muller, "'Beat Generation' Finds Mecca in S.F.," *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 May 1958, sec. 1, p. 3.

literary icons such as Kerouac and Ginsberg, and especially Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder, often used Asian religious imagery in general and Buddhism in particular in their writing.[100] Yet in the broader bohemian culture of North Beach, religion played a less significant role. North Beach bohemians often expressed sharp criticism of institutional Christianity. Delattre averred that "most organized religion doesn't reach the people. You only have to see their faces when they gather in big, cold churches. There is no sadder sight. Christianity is supposed to be joyous but in this country people live in fear of sensuality and practice a petty morality that is cut and dried. They don't get any joy out of their religion."[101] The poet Bob Kaufman ridiculed evangelists, proclaiming that "Billy Graham can plug you into the Christ machine. Mail in your mind today. Hurry,

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[100]See Stephen Prothero, "On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest," *Harvard Theological Review* 84 (April 1991): 205-222, and "Introduction," in Carole Tonkinson, ed., *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995); Carl T. Jackson, "The Counterculture Looks East: Beat Writers and Asian Religion," *American Studies* 29 (January 1988): 51-70; and John Lardas, *Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Beat writers and popular writing about the beats, including Alan Watts' *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1959) and Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Viking, 1958) played an important role in disseminating alternative religious practices in general and Buddhism in particular to broader American audiences in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This dissemination has yet to be fully studied by scholars, but limited assessments include Prothero, "On the Holy Road," Jackson, "Counterculture Looks East," and Rick Fields, *How the Swan Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (1981; revised, Boston: Shambhala, 1992), chaps. 11-12.

[101]Monique Benoit, "The Beatniks' Minister," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 April 1963, no sec., n. p., "Delattre, Pierre; Reverend of the Beats" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

bargain God week, lasts only one week."[102] Another bohemian was raised as a Catholic and for years felt an "ardent" faith, but then abruptly abandoned Catholicism "just like that," because it seemed to have "no meaning."[103] Moreover, when fifty-one North Beach bohemians were interviewed for a sociological study, twenty-four expressed no religious belief or faith at all.[104] The study concluded that "this Bohemian community was characterized by intense expression of feelings which in some cases appeared in religious form. It was, then, the intensity of religious expression by a few which created the impression of an over-all religiosity in this community."[105] In short, religion was not a significant factor in the lives of many bohemians in North Beach, and some harbored an intense contempt for institutional Christianity.

Religious sentiments of all stripes and almost any other ideas were open for discussion at the Bread and Wine Mission, which was an immediate success when Delattre opened it 1958. The popularity of the Mission derived as much from its role as a community center as from its status as a religious institution. Located in an old store front, the Mission had a hi-fi stereo, a five-gallon coffee urn and a collection of 2,000 books owned by Delattre, but it lacked a name until he hung a sign announcing that free

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[102]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 38.

[103]Ibid., 46.

[104]Ibid., 35.

[105]Ibid., 38.

bread and wine would be served weekly, and from the start locals poured in.[106] Kamstra recalled that people gathered to talk "until the sun drove the night away," and one attendee noted favorably of Delattre, "you have to have something on the ball to be a minister and have these people like you."[107] Actually, Delattre had two things on the ball: he actively supported art and literature and never discussed religion unless asked to do so. The Mission held art shows, plays, and weekly poetry readings that drew over-capacity crowds, and soon the editors of *Beatitude*, a little magazine for local writers, began publishing there.[108] The Mission held no formal religious services, but every Sunday Delattre invited a handful of bohemians to his flat upstairs (where he lived with his wife and their two children) for bread, wine and cheese in the spirit of the agape practiced by early Christians.[109] Although "abstruse theological discussions" often occurred at the Mission, Delattre encouraged but did not initiate such conversations himself.[110] As he put it, "if they ask, I reply."[111] North Beach bohemians found such a setting irresistible: they could gather for a wide array of artistic and literary events, peruse books from a sizable private library, count on one good meal every week and an endless supply of coffee every

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[106]"Far-Out Mission," 38.

[107] Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 3, p. 5; "Minister for the 'Beatniks,'" *Newsweek*, 16 March 1959, 88.

[108]"Minister for the 'Beatniks,'" 88; *Beatitude* 11 (2 November 1959), n. p.

[109]"Far-Out Mission," 38.

[110]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 4.

[111]"Far-Out Mission," 38.

night, and discuss spirituality with a novelist-minister who emphasized community over conversion.

Indeed, the Bread and Wine Mission was uniquely suited to North Beach. Delattre believed that "there are two aspects of the ministry–the ministry of proclamation and of response. The ministry of response is listening, knowing a person, receiving his gift."[112] He affirmed that "many people preach to me, and I've been transformed." When the Mission began, "I was anxious to see practical results. Now I've learned that one must act according to one's conviction in relation to others, and then let them go without standing around to see what the effect has been."[113] This did not mean that Delattre had no concern with conversion or that he was content merely to make the scene without influencing it, but rather that he felt a need to listen and learn rather than preach and proselytize. He believed that the gatherings at the Mission could broaden his own spiritual awareness as well as lead other people to religious faith. For Delattre, the Mission was a "religious coffee house," an environment with a "loving communal atmosphere" that he hoped would "bring out the creative good in the artist."[114] With a degree in English and several unpublished novels, Delattre could relate to people as a writer, as someone who appreciated literature and aspired to artistic creativity himself. Simultaneously, as an essentially non-denominational minister, Delattre created a key

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[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Herb Caen column, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 October 1958, 23; Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 38.

institution in North Beach that served many of the artistic, spiritual and community needs of bohemians.

As in North Beach, bohemians in Venice expressed a wide range of views on religion, from bitter denunciations of institutionalized theology to strong affirmations of faith. Lawrence Lipton, in his self-appointed role as spokesman for the beat generation of Los Angeles, labeled the beats "holy barbarians" and insisted that much of their rebellion derived from a spiritual crisis in postwar society which led bohemians to reject organized religion entirely. While he acknowledged that some Venice bohemians "had the experience of going back to the Church–it is usually Catholicism–in their search for the numinous," he knew no one "who has found, or expects to find, any ritual salvation in the churches."[115] Instead, Lipton emphasized the importance of Zen Buddhism, which provided "release from the rat race of the ten thousand things" by enabling individuals to "*let go*, for it is not 'they,' the 'things,' which are bedeviling us, it is we who are *clutching* them."[116] Thus Lipton, like many beat intellectuals, viewed Eastern religion a means to transcend the debilitating influence of consumerism. Another Venice bohemian opined that "we're in a spiritual revolution because the squares always have been in control of religion," but now "the beats are the real religionists" because they recognized that "every man must work out his identity himself."[117] Linking the nefarious influence

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[115]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 162, 165.

[116]Ibid., 169.

[117]Neff, "Beatniks' Search Leads to a Life of Squalor," p. 10.

of squares to the corruption of religious life, this individual shared with many bohemians the view that religion was an intensely personal matter with which no outside authority should interfere.

For Stuart Perkoff, Judaism was an important part of identity as a poet. Perkoff was not devoutly religious but often linked his vocation as a writer with his Jewish heritage. Perkoff did not attend religious services, and although as a young man he felt "very Jewish" on holy days like Yom Kippur, by the late 1950s it struck him as "rather naive to think of atoning for the sins of an entire year, in 24 hours," when each day was both "atonement and sin."[118] For Perkoff, being Jewish was primarily "to be obsessed with the word," not of any particular god but of all poets, and he often felt ambivalent about attempting to be a Jewish bard.[119] On one occasion, ruminating on the anniversary of the Warsaw uprising of Polish Jews during World War II, he noted that "whenever I have tried to write something about the Ghetto massacre, it has always been stiff and unreal," and he concluded that "I am no bard of my people, or, perhaps, I have no people to be bard of."[120] Yet he felt a close bond with a fellow poet because "we were both in our pasts Jewish political intellectuals" (a reference to their youthful attraction to Communism), and in talking to her about poetry he realized a desire to "re-work myself

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[118]Perkoff, journal no. 23, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[119]Perkoff, journal no. 27, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[120]Perkoff, journal no. 25, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

into the position of Voice of the race speaking to the race!"[121] Thus Perkoff was ambivalent about being a Jewish poet: he felt a powerful connection to Jewish history, but he often struggled to incorporate Jewish identity into his poetry.

Yet if some Los Angeles bohemians believed that both countercultural rebellion and literary creativity had religious components, others found religion far less important. The owner of a coffeehouse near L.A. City College succinctly affirmed that "I've been an agnostic since I was twelve years old."[122] Moreover, as the L.A. writer Lionel Rolfe noted of beats like Kerouac, "God was the Holy Grail of their writing" and "coffee houses were their shrines."[123] Regardless of the attitudes that individual bohemians expressed toward religion, nearly all of them valorized the public spaces in which they congregated.

Bohemian Entrepreneurs in North Beach

For people who gravitated toward bohemian enclaves, public spaces such as restaurants, cafes and nightclubs were a focal point of social life and group interaction. In North Beach, bohemians frequented venues clustered around Grant Avenue, Green Street and Columbus Avenue in the heart of the district. Popular hangouts included bars like the Place, Vesuvio, the Black Cat and the Anxious Asp, cafes such as Enrico's, the Coffee Gallery and the venerable Co-Existence Bagel Shop, nightclubs like the Cellar and

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[121]Perkoff, journal nos. 37 and 38, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[122]Personal interview with Levi Kingston, 14 June 2002, Los Angeles, California.

[123]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 21.

the hungry i, and local bookstores, most especially City Lights Books.[124] These public spaces attracted avant-garde intellectuals, weekend visitors, and tourists, an eclectic clientele that encouraged many bar and café owners to advertise their businesses as authentically "beat" and bohemian hangouts. Appealing to this diverse clientele often meant navigating a middle ground between bohemian authenticity and tourist accessibility, as small-business owners sought to maintain one customer base of avant-garde literati yet simultaneously capitalize on the influx of newcomers. Similar tensions between authenticity and entrepreneurship, substance and facade, pervaded bohemianism in both the U.S. and western Europe. Henri Murger enjoyed a career chronicling bohemian Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, motivated by a mixture of crass exploitation and a genuine belief that bohemia played a central role in the aesthetic development of many artists and writers.[125] In New York during the 1910s, Mabel Dodge shrewdly created the most celebrated salon in America by blending a sincere commitment to radical politics with a desire for fame and adulation as one of the "movers and shakers" of avant-garde Manhattan.[126] Most notoriously, perhaps, was the Harlem Renaissance,

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[124]Green, *"A Kind of Beatness,"* 5; see also Bill Morgan, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2003), particularly chaps. 2, 3 and 4.

[125]Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (1986; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 47, 57-58.

[126]Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 100-111; Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 383-396; Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New*

when African American intellectuals who sought to explore black history and culture, and affluent white aesthetes who were mesmerized by the exoticism of racial intermixing, together made uptown Manhattan the most vibrant creative center in America.[127] In short, avant-garde intellectual life rarely flourished without the astute and often opportunistic machinations of its fiercest devotees. Yet the beatnik fad of the late 1950s and early 1960s constituted an acutely commercialized episode in American bohemianism, as an array of mass media disseminated unconventionality to a national audience amidst a rapidly expanding economy and culture of commodity consumption.[128] With the publicity surrounding the beats, many small-business owners in bohemian enclaves sought simultaneously to exploit and support the growing public interest in avant-garde literary and cultural life, to capitalize on the beatnik craze and subsidize local artists and writers. This contradictory endeavor was a key characteristic of countercultural entrepreneurship.

Henri Lenoir exemplified entrepreneurs who simultaneously exploited popular interest in bohemianism and promoted local artists. After emigrating from Switzerland and working in a variety of marketing jobs (including selling hosiery to prostitutes),

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Woman, New Worlds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), chap. 3.

[127]David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981; reprint: New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 162-165, 175-189; Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 103-109, 124-128.

[128]On postwar consumerism, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

Lenoir became majordomo at the Iron Pot restaurant in the early 1940s.[129] The Iron Pot nearly went bankrupt until Lenoir decided not merely to display the work of local painters but offer it for sale, including discount raffle tickets to draw customers (each artist got two-thirds of the proceeds and Lenoir one-third). As more paintings sold, the restaurant drew both art collectors and tourists hoping to glimpse real-life painters.[130] For Lenoir, countercultural authenticity was both a commodity to be adroitly marketed and an inside joke with which to tease the uninitiated. Aware that many customers came mainly to gawk at "real" bohemians, Lenoir included a "notice to tourists" on the menu warning that "the bohemian atmosphere here is strictly phony. For genuine bohemian atmosphere, go to the Black Cat," a nearby bar and one of his favorite hangouts.[131] In late 1940s, Lenoir opened the Vesuvio bar, and a few years later City Lights Books opened next door.[132] When the beat generation became big news, Lenoir hired a local denizen to sit by the window so tourists could see a genuine beatnik, and he advertised "Trader Henri's

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[129]Spencer Barefoot, "Art–Music: You Order the Dinner and Maybe a Painting," *San Francisco Chronicle*, no date (adjacent clippings indicate that this article dates from the early 1940s), no sec., p. 18, in Henri Lenoir Scrapbooks, 1941-1965, volume I, p. 11; Monique Benoit, "Monique's Daily Male: His Route to S.F. Was Lively," hand-written date 5 March 1963, Lenoir Scrapbooks, volume II, p. 48, Henri Lenoir Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley (hereafter cited as Lenoir Collection, UCB).

[130]J.G. Hilliard, "The Iron Pot," *The Restaurant Digest*, no date, n. p., Lenoir Scrapbooks, volume I, p. 8; Barefoot, "Art–Music," Lenoir Collection, UCB.

[131]Menu from Iron Pot Restaurant, Lenoir Scrapbooks, volume I, p. 3, Lenoir Collection, UCB.

[132]Benoit, "Monique's Daily Male," Lenoir Collection, UCB.

Do-It-Yourself Beatnik Kit for Ladies and Gentlemen," which promised to make buyers "suave and uninhibited" enough to "crash the pad parties . . . unobserved!" or alternately to "stun your neighbors."[133] As manager and owner of North Beach bars and restaurants, Lenoir simultaneously exploited public interest in bohemianism and helped support art in San Francisco: promoting his businesses as bohemian hangouts drew tourists as customers, while using the Iron Pot and later Vesuvio to showcase artistic talent helped painters gain recognition of and compensation for their work.

Prospering from the popularity of the beat generation as a bar or café owner in North Beach often meant developing a customer base of both avant-garde intellectuals and tourists, and some entrepreneurs found it difficult to attain such a middle ground. Jay Hoppe founded the Co-Existence Bagel Shop in the mid 1950s at the bustling intersection of Grant Avenue and Green Street.[134] This location guaranteed high visibility, and the Bagel Shop was one of the most well-known bohemian cafes in San Francisco. Local artists and writers hung out at the bistro in part because they often attained free food from employees. As the painter Arthur Monroe recalled, the Bagel Shop was "the capital of North Beach," where "the elite of the Beat munched on sandwiches and ideas" or "drank

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[133]Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America* (New York: Random House, 1979), 277; photograph of poster in window of Vesuvio's, Lenoir Scrapbooks, volume II, p. 19.

[134]Michael Harris, "Non-Existence . . . Beats Too Hungry, the City Too Square" [title on clipping incomplete], *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 October 1960, no sec., n p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

of poetry and beer."[135] Monroe concluded that "this was the scene and you made it or you were Dead," reflecting the importance that many intellectuals attached to public spaces in which they interacted with colleagues.[136] Among habitues of the Bagel Shop, few were more popular than Bob Kaufman, who often gave impassioned recitations of his poetry and occasionally smashed a window after drinking excessively.[137] The presence of a famous local poet like Kaufman sparked the interest of tourists, but as Kamstra noted, the venue "had a certain fierce intensity about it that intimidated newcomers," as "every now and then an angry customer whom Jay Hoppe 86'd [sic] would walk by and toss a beer bottle through the window. Or someone else from inside would pick up a chair and make himself some fresh air" by smashing yet another window.[138] While some tourists suffered through vituperative verse to glimpse a genuine beat poet, few tolerated beer bottles crashing against the walls. As one habitue observed, the Bagel Shop "brought the tourists" into North Beach but "never caught the money trade" itself, attracting instead a clientele who "nursed a beer all evening" and regarded the place as "home."[139] Thus Hoppe confronted the ironic situation of operating one of the most famous beat hangouts

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[135]Monroe, "Decade of Bebop," 2.

[136]Ibid.

[137]"'Beat' Beats Out Poetry–Ends in Jug," *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 December 1959, no sec., n p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC; Warren Hinckle, "A Beat Prisoner of Old North Beach," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 February 1978, no sec., n. p., "Ginsberg, Allen, S.F. Poet" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[138]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4, p. 45, 42-43.

[139]Harris, "Non-Existence," no sec., n.p.

in San Francisco yet failing to attract a steady flow of paying customers. Bar and café owners in North Beach often had to balance authenticity and respectability by appealing to poets and painters, frequent visitors and tourists as customers. Writers and artists loved the camaraderie and the likelihood of eating for free, yet they had little money to spend and their raucous carousing scared away more affluent tourists who sought an entertaining but safe form of exoticism. In sum, the free-spirited milieu that made the Bagel Shop famous also impeded profitability.

Despite the difficulty that some café owners encountered, such public spaces were the focal of point of social life among North Beach bohemians and attracted a wide variety of customers. When bohemians spoke of "making the scene," they meant above all else hanging out in a café, restaurant or bar, one of the "drink-and-think shops" that provided stimulating conversation and a broad range of artistic, literary and musical performances. Eileen Kaufman, wife of Bob Kaufman, recalled that "spontaneity was the key word in our life style [sic] in North Beach. This is what made it 'the scene,' for one never knew in advance just who might show [up] to read a poem, dance, play some jazz, or put on a complete play."[140] Significantly, such creative climates did not always limit frequent visitors and tourists to the role of spectators but rather provided them with opportunities for impromptu self-expression. The Place, a bar founded in the early 1950s by two alumni of Black Mountain College, featured Blabbermouth Night every Monday, an event in which anyone could speak on whatever topic they chose, with the best orator

[140]Eileen Kaufman, "From *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers*?" 113.

winning a bottle of champagne.[141] Journalists noted that "Bohemians and tourists alike" participated, and that "depending on the subject matter the audience is either serious and silent or noisy and insulting." Topics one night ranged from "Was Macbeth Beat," "The New Hipster" and "The Evil Effects of Sack Dresses and Beer Cans" to "The Philosophy of the Inner Psyche," "American Imperialism" and "The Iraq Rebellion."[142] Although North Beach denizens often spent more time at the microphone than tourists, this wide range of discussion, in terms of both subject matter and participants, indicated that a diverse mixture of people engaged in both whimsical revelry and more substantive considerations of contemporary political issues. Events such as Blabbermouth Night provided environments in which self-expression, intellectual stimulation and creativity were not limited to established painters and poets but rather were possible for virtually anyone.

Like many bars and coffeehouses in North Beach, City Lights Books provided an atmosphere congenial to lively conversation as well as reading. Originally founded to subsidize a little magazine of the same name, the bookstore was an instant success when

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[141]Black Mountain College was an alternative school founded in North Carolina in the mid 1930s. During the 1950s, Black Mountain included avant-garde poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. See Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (1972; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

[142]Joe Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," *This Week* (Sunday magazine supplement to *Los Angeles Times*), 28 September 1958, 34; *Blabbermouth Night at the Place*, audio cassette recording ca. 15 April 1957, (Intelirap Records, 2002).

it opened in 1953.[143] The Bay Area in the early 1950s was an especially propitious location for an all-paperback bookstore, as the literary "renaissance" in San Francisco brought local writers greater attention both regionally and nationally, while the rapid expansion of paperback publishing after World War II meant that both classical literature and the latest avant-garde voices could be attained at lower prices.[144] Ferlinghetti astutely exploited the growing interest in paperbacks, using newspaper advertisements that invited Bay Area residents to "join in the delights of the paperback revolution which is literally changing the lives and reading habits of millions."[145] In addition to a vast array of avant-garde literature, the store sold left-wing political periodicals and FM radios for use in listening to the Pacifica network on KPFA (one of the first listener-sponsored radio stations in the U.S.). Yet the bookstore was appealing not only because it contained a wide selection of reading material but also because customers could stay as long as they wanted, regardless of whether they purchased anything. One advertisement asked, "Why Buy Books??? [sic] when you can read them at the City Lights Pocket Bookshop."[146]

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[143]Ralph Sipper, "A Cultural Catalyst," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 19 January 1975, no sec., n. p., "Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. Poet, City Lights Books, 1973–" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[144]On the growing popularity of paperback books and the proliferation of paperback bookstores in the postwar decades, see Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 266-269.

[145]Advertisement, *This World*, 2 December 1956, 19, carton 3, "City Lights Publicity" folder, City Lights Books Records, 1953-1970, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley (hereafter cited as City Lights Records, UCB).

[146]Advertisement, no date, but position of ad next to another for Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans* indicates date circa 1958 (when *Subterraneans* was published), carton

Aware that some people came as much to talk as to read, Ferlinghetti hung a sign admonishing patrons to "be sure brain is engaged before setting jaw in motion."[147] This reputation for promoting reading and conversing as well as purchasing continued into the mid 1960s, when a visitor from Greenwich Village demanded, "why doesn't New York have such a relaxed place? At City Lights you can sit downstairs among the poetry all day."[148] Reflecting on the instant success of the store, Ferlinghetti recalled that "we were open seven days a week till midnight, and we literally could not shut the doors at closing time. We seemed to be responding to a deeply felt need."[149] Although the instant success of City Lights rested substantially on its location in a city with a vibrant literary culture and a growing market for low-cost paperbacks, the store also replicated the atmosphere of neighboring coffeehouses and bistros, with an environment that encouraged self-expression and camaraderie among patrons.

Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Los Angeles

Unlike San Francisco, postwar Los Angeles was not regarded as a center of literary creativity or bohemian unconventionality, but in the late 1950s and early 1960s,

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3, "City Lights Publicity" folder, City Lights Records, UCB.

[147]Kenneth Tynan, "San Francisco: The Rebels," *Holiday*, April 1961, 196.

[148]Tim McNamara, "Underground Literary Review," *East Village Other*, 15 March 1966, n. p., carton 4, eleventh folder, labeled "Clippings," City Lights Records, UCB.

[149]Sipper, "Cultural Catalyst," no sec., n.p.

L.A. developed a thriving coffeehouse culture, fueled largely by growing public interest in poetry readings and folk music. This occurred as coffeehouses became more popular throughout America. In 1956, *Newsweek* reported that net profits for coffeehouses in the U.S. rose to $5 million in the previous year.[150] The growing popularity of folk music stimulated the growth of coffeehouses that featured folk performers, while mass-media depictions of the beat generation publicized the bars and cafes where poets read their work to over-capacity audiences. Thus, increasing interest in folk music occurred in tandem with the rising popularity of poetry readings, and many coffeehouses featured both folk music and poetry recitations on a regular basis. Significantly, the spread of coffeehouses was not limited to cities with well established artistic and literary pedigrees but rather was evident in many large cities and university towns throughout America.[151]

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[150]"The Alluring Cupful," *Newsweek*, 8 October 1956, 86.

[151]For contemporary accounts of how the beats created greater public interest in poetry readings, see O'Neil, 116; Jim Morad, "The Coffee Houses [sic] of America," *Playboy*, July 1959, 43, 95; "Capital Bars Beatnik Bagel," *San Francisco Examiner*, 18 May 1958, sec. 1, p. 3; Leo Lerman, "The Village Idea," *Mademoiselle*, June 1962, 69; and Nancy Lynch, "The Square Root of Bohemia," *Mademoiselle*, June 1962, 137. On the extent to which avant-garde poets and painters on the one hand, and folk musicians and fans on the other, formed distinct but overlapping bohemian cultures that often intersected in urban public spaces such as coffeehouses, see Unterberger, *Turn! Turn! Turn!* 33-35, 38; and Ronald D. Cohen, "Singing Subversion: Folk Music and the Counterculture of the 1950s," in Cornelis A. van Minnen, Jaap van der Bent, and Mel van Elteren, eds., *Beat Culture: The 1950s and Beyond* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999), 117, 119-121, 126-127. For a very limited assessment of how the mass media stimulated the growth of coffeehouses in the late 1950s, see Laurel Klinger-Vartabedian and Robert A. Vartabedian, "Media and Discourse in the Twentieth-Century Coffeehouse Movement," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26 (Winter 1992): 211-218, and for a broader analysis of how mass-media representations of the beat generation publicized urban public spaces in which bohemians gathered, see chap. 1 of this dissertation.

The *Los Angeles Mirror News* reported that from 1958 to 1959 the number of coffeehouses in the city increased from seven to 49, while the writer Lionel Rolfe, a habitue of bohemian hangouts throughout southern California, estimated that by 1960 there were approximately 50 coffeehouses in L.A.[152] The growing number of coffeehouses in Los Angeles constituted an expansion of the urban geography of bohemia, a proliferation of public spaces that featured art exhibitions, poetry readings, performances of jazz, folk and blues music, and attracted people who felt an affinity for the unconventional assumptions of avant-garde artists, writers and musicians.[153]

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[152]Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks from L.A. Coffee Houses," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 2 June 1959, sec. 2, p. 1; Rolfe, *In Search of . . . Literary L.A.* (Los Angeles: California Classics Books, 1991), 13; and Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 21.

[153]Historians and cultural studies scholars have explored the ways social groups such as women and homosexuals utilized commercialized urban spaces to attain a greater public presence and craft new forms of autonomy, in the process altering the urban landscapes in which they lived, worked and socialized. Among the many relevant studies, see especially Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Brett Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*; Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow, 1997); and Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, eds., *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997). Like women and homosexuals, individuals who found bohemian alternatives appealing utilized public space, frequenting coffeehouses and bars that validated countercultural assumptions and behavior.

Furthermore, the sprawling horizontality that characterizes Los Angeles has recently drawn the attention of an "L.A. School" of urban theorists who highlight the city as the archetypal urban embodiment of postindustrial economics and postmodern culture. Among the many studies that portray Los Angeles as the quintessential American city of

Los Angeles also differed from San Francisco in that it lacked a single district that dominated the local bohemian culture. Bohemianism in postwar San Francisco was most certainly not limited to North Beach, as districts such as Potrero Hill, the States Street area near the Castro, and the Fillmore all attracted writers, artists and musicians, while outlying towns such as Berkeley and Sausalito hosted bohemian colonies of their own.[154] Yet in the late 1950s and early 1960s, North Beach retained the rowdy aura of the old Barbary Coast, contained an array of popular cafes, bars, bookstores and art galleries (as well as the California School of Fine Arts), and was promoted by the mass media as the

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late twentieth century, see especially Allen J. Scott and Edward Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Charles Jencks, *Heteropolis: Los Angeles, the Riots, and the Strange Beauty of Hetero-Architecture* (London: Academy Editions/New York: St. Martin's, 1993); and Davis, *City of Quartz*. For an overview of this scholarship, see "Review Essays: Historicizing the City of Angels," *American Historical Review* 105 (December 2000), 1667-1991. While these studies tend to overstate the archetypal significance of L.A., they quite properly foreground the extent to which the spatial horizontality of the city shaped its economy, politics and culture. For an excellent urban history, see Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (1967, reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). As with other aspects of Los Angeles history, the horizontal and decentralized urban environment of the city played a decisive factor in shaping the bohemian counterculture that emerged there in the late 1950s.

[154]Green, *"A Kind of Beatness,"* 5-6; Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 5, n. p.; Philip Whalen, journals, 15 November 1963 to 12 April 1964, box 1, folder 6, Philip Whalen Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley; Gerd Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist, 1948-1978," oral history transcript, interviewed by Victoria Morris Byerly in 1996, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley (hereafter cited as ROHO), 54-55; Shirley Staschen Triest, "A Life on the First Waves of Radical Bohemianism in San Francisco," oral history transcript, interviewed by Victoria Morris Byerly in 1995 and 1996, ROHO, 99; Stern also interviewed in Triest oral history, 277-278; Arthur Monroe, personal interview with author, 1 August 2002, Oakland, California.

national headquarters of the beat generation. To a significant extent, North Beach was the focal point of both avant-garde intellectual life and bohemian unconventionality in San Francisco. As Kamstra recalled, "San Francisco was ablaze and North Beach was the center of the bonfire."[155] In contrast, the stature of Venice as a place that fostered artistic creativity and encouraged nonconformity emerged only in the late 1950s, as local newspapers devoted greater coverage to the beat generation of Los Angeles and the publication of *The Holy Barbarians* by Lawrence Lipton brought national attention to bohemianism in the city.[156] Moreover, Venice was located on the periphery of a sprawling metropolis in which numerous districts drew substantial numbers of people seeking the alternative atmosphere of bohemian public space. Areas such as Hollywood and the Sunset Strip contained many popular nightclubs and coffeehouses, while enclaves such as Echo Park and Silver Lake had harbored avant-garde writers and left-wing politicos for decades.[157] As one L.A. bohemian observed, a night out with friends often

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[155]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 3, p. 8.

[156]For an analysis of *The Holy Barbarians* and Lipton's role in bringing greater national attention to the bohemian culture of Los Angeles, see chap. 1 of this dissertation.

[157]Personal interview with Lionel Rolfe, 9 August 2001; Walden "Monty" Muns, "Loose Change and Promises: The California Coffee-House Characters of the 1960s," unpublished manuscript, copy in author's possession, 7, 39, 55. Muns fondly recalled "'our' people" in the "Echo Park Soviet" of the 1960s. On bohemian culture in Echo Park during the 1920s, see Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 329. Mike Davis dismisses the "essentially harmless Echo Park bohemia" of the interwar years (*City of Quartz*, 90 n. 20). On the symbiosis that characterized the various left-wing political factions and avant-garde artists, writers and musicians in the U. S. during the 1930s and 1940s, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

involved roving all over the city, from Venice at the western edge to Pasadena on the eastern side, because unlike "*the* Village" in New York, the horizontal and decentralized environment of Los Angeles precluded the emergence of a single area as the dominant bohemia of the city, and journeying from one enclave to another was "the nature of the beast" that was countercultural L.A.[158] Thus a scattered constellation of bohemian districts dotted Los Angeles, and while Venice was the most famous of these in the late 1950s, it did not dominate the local counterculture to the extent that North Beach did in San Francisco.

In such a metropolitan context, the atmosphere within particular coffeehouses varied substantially from one district to another. Venice was an economically depressed and predominantly working-class area with a small colony of avant-garde intellectuals, and the owners and managers of coffeehouses in the district often prioritized the dissemination of creative work by local poets and painters to audiences interested in art and literature. They were less concerned with attracting affluent customers, who were in relatively short supply in the immediate vicinity. In contrast, Hollywood contained a large proportion of actors, writers and technicians who worked for movie studios, and in this more prosperous setting, café owners created more upscale spaces designed to entice customers who had disposable income as well as a desire to hear poetry or folk music.[159]

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[158]Personal interview with Levi Kingston, 14 June 2002. Emphasis in original.

[159]The rapid expansion of the movie industry in Los Angeles brought thousands of screenwriters, actors, set designers and studio technicians to Hollywood in the 1920s, many of whom preferred rental housing that was close to the studios where they worked. By the end of the decade, Hollywood contained a substantial proportion of what little

Yet despite these differences, café owners throughout L.A. often shared the goal of making art, whether it was poetry, painting or music, more accessible to the public.

This was certainly the intention of Al Matthews, a defense attorney who sought to assist artists and writers in Venice financially and increase public awareness of the creative activity in the district. Well known in California during the 1950s for representing individuals in high-profile murder and death penalty cases, Matthews was respected among many defense lawyers in L.A.[160] In the summer of 1959, he established a coffeehouse that he hoped would function as "a new cultural center," a place for poets and painters to exchange ideas, learn from each other and educate the broader community about "what the new generation was doing."[161] The Gas House was located on Ocean Front Walk, the "Promenade" of Venice that ran along the beach and contained a handful

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apartment housing existed in L.A. and had a more concentrated population than most other parts of the city. See Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 151, and Starr, 214-216. This trend toward a relatively concentrated and affluent population in Hollywood intensified in the 1950s, when television production (excluding news) shifted from New York to Los Angeles and thousands of people in the TV industry moved to Hollywood (and many other actors divided their time between the theaters of New York and the TV and movie studios of Hollywood), while the construction of sprawling suburbs boomed in other parts of Los Angeles County. On the rise of L.A. as the center of television production, see Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (1975; 2nd revised edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 195-198.

[160]Jack Jones, "Al Matthews, Celebrated Defense Lawyer, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1986, sec. 2, p. 2, and "Judge Nye Honored by 600 at Banquet," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 8 April 1960, no sec., n. p., "Al Matthews" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[161]Jerry Hulse, "Beatniks Beat Bongos in Basement, Hearing Told," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1959, sec. 1, p. 2; and "Gas House Defended," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 3 September 1959, no sec., n. p., "Beatniks" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

of bars, cafes and restaurants frequented mainly by area residents.[162] The coffeehouse held art exhibitions, poetry readings and jazz performances that drew the local intelligentsia as well as weekend bohemians and tourists.[163] Matthews also rented a nearby hotel and made the top floor a free residence for artists and writers, who ate gratis at the Gas House, but in-fighting among prospective residents and the inability of the rundown establishment to attract paying customers led him to abandon the venture after a few months.[164] Nor was the Gas House profitable, as Matthews left day-to-day management to local poets and painters who rarely hesitated to feed their comrades for free, forcing Matthews to subsidize the operation with his own money.[165] Seeking neither to buy entrance into the hipster class of southern California nor to profit from sudden interest in the beats of Venice, Matthews instead hoped to spur artistic and literary creativity by providing poets and painters with environments in which they could

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[162]Venice residents often referred to the Ocean Front Walk as "the Promenade:" see Perkoff, journal no. 25, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[163]Peck, "Vive La Difference," no sec., n.p; Rolfe, *Literary L.A.*, 13, Perkoff (who often came to hear jazz music), journal no. 35, Perkoff Papers, UCLA, and John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 120.

[164]"Beats Want to Be Pals, Dig It?" *Los Angeles Examiner*, 29 August 1959, no sec., n. p., "Beatniks" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC; Perkoff journal nos. 4 and 20, Perkoff Papers, UCLA (Perkoff briefly lived at the hotel); and Maynard, 131-133, 143.

[165]Peck, "Vive La Difference," no sec., n.p., and Maynard, *Venice West*, 115. The management and customers of Gas House confronted harassment from the Los Angeles Police Department almost from the very moment the coffeehouse began operation–see chap. 4 of this dissertation.

exchange ideas and disseminate their work to broader audiences.

If the Gas House failed to make money for Matthews, it still epitomized bohemianism in Venice, largely because Lawrence Lipton ceaselessly promoted it as headquarters of the beat generation in southern California. With the permission of Matthews, Lipton served as director of "entertainment" at the coffeehouse, which largely meant spearheading a public relations campaign designed to attract as much attention as possible.[166] Speaking to local reporters, Lipton proclaimed that inside the Gas House, beat poets and painters "make beautiful [sic] in the presence of the audience," who attained "the salvation of the soul" and "the enlightenment of the mind."[167] When the CBS radio network featured a national broadcast on "The Beatniks," Lipton took the interviewer inside the Gas House to experience "a workshop for artists and poets, musicians, painters, sculptors" that "admits the general public on certain specified evenings" for the purpose of "transforming the audience" and spreading "the message of art as a form of salvation."[168] Using hyperbolic rhetoric to portray the Gas House as a quasi-religious and semi-exclusive arena in which the general public could glimpse the creative genius of the avant-garde intelligentsia, Lipton essentially relegated art and

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[166]Maynard, *Venice West*, 114, 120.

[167]"Beatniks 'Cut Out' of Hearing," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 9 September 1959, no sec., n.p., "Venice CA" envelope and "Lawrence Lipton" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[168]"The Beatniks," CBS Radio broadcast, hosted by Sydney Omarr, 1959, Lawrence Lipton tape no. 453, American Literature Collection, Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections, University of Southern California (hereafter cited as Lipton Tapes, USC).

literature to a side-show in which would-be celebrities milked the limelight for all it was worth. In the process, he made the Gas House the most famous beatnik hangout in Los Angeles.

For some individuals, countercultural entrepreneurship was an attempt to reconcile the desire to be a writer or artist with the need to survive economically. Although Stuart Perkoff reviled the showmanship of Lipton as an effort to "make nothing out of something in the land of opportunity," he did have an affinity for the intellectual camaraderie of coffeehouses.[169] Using money borrowed from his father, Perkoff established the Venice West Café in the summer of 1958 in a "filthy" and "crumbling" old store front just off the Ocean Front Walk.[170] His tenure as a businessman lasted until early January, when, amidst an increase in both his use of heroin and his commitment to writing poetry as a vocation, he "just walked away" from the entire affair, which he later regarded as "a last desperate attempt to come in to the social structure, to function in square society, *without losing identity*" as a poet.[171] After this "purging of the soul," he realized that it was pointless to be "fucking around in *business*" and decided to "rebuild" his life around writing and painting, "the sources of my energies."[172] In sharp contrast to an individual like Ferlinghetti, who succeeded as both a business owner and a widely

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[169]Perkoff, journal no. 26, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[170]Perkoff, journal no. 4, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[171]Ibid., emphasis in original.

[172]Ibid. and journal no. 7, Perkoff Papers, UCLA. Emphasis in original.

respected poet, Perkoff concluded that entrepreneurship and art were mutually exclusive: his brief stint as a café owner only reinforced the extent to which a life devoted to poetry seemed incompatible with any conventional means of economic survival.

The promotional wizardry of Lipton helped bring frequent visitors and tourists to Venice, but coffeehouse owners in the district often prioritized supporting poets and painters rather than exploiting the beatnik fad. When Perkoff abandoned the Venice West Café, ownership passed to John Kenevan, a Korean War veteran majoring in psychology at UCLA.[173] A few months later the publication of *The Holy Barbarians* and the ensuing media frenzy brought hordes of new customers to the district. Kenevan plastered the crumbling walls but otherwise maintained a modest establishment that one visitor described as "an unpretentious place ornamented by a few paintings and quotations from Kafka and other writers."[174] Shortly after newcomers began crowding into the café, Kenevan told the *Los Angeles Mirror-News* that "if it gets too popular and starts to make a lot of money I will probably close it down."[175] He was not affecting a pose for reporters: wounded in combat, Kenevan received a monthly disability check that financed his spartan home in a nearby store front and enabled him to use profits from his business to provide a few artists and writers with free meals and assistance in renting nearby spaces in which to live and work, leading locals to dub the area near the café "Kenevan

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[173]Maynard, 103, 112; Laro, "Beat Generation: New Look," 1-2; Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads,' Tourist Novelty Gone," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 April 1962, sec. G, p. 5.

[174]Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks," sec. 2, 1.

[175]Ibid.

Row."[176] Prioritizing "the study of one's self," Kenevan believed that living in Venice and constantly meeting new people as a café owner sparked "an understanding of myself that is more valuable than the wealthy person that as a child of 15 I wanted to be."[177] Benefitting both from growing public interest in bohemianism and a small but stable outside income, Kenevan regarded his business not as a source of profit but rather as a unique vantage point from which to experience countercultural life in Venice and assist artists and writers.

As in North Beach, coffeehouses in Venice attracted both poets and painters who lived in the district as well as frequent visitors who appreciated the alternative atmosphere of bohemian public spaces. On weekdays, Perkoff often sat in the "shady refuge" of the Venice West Café (after he no longer managed it), "waiting for the poets to arrive."[178] On weekends, when the café overflowed with visitors, he felt that "the people here are such strangers to me, for the most part, both beatniks and tourists," yet he sensed "a certain excitement in the air" and could "sit here writing in my journal and truly not give a shit" about the newcomers, because this unique public setting made him appreciate "how private a world of book and pen could be."[179] Thus the café stimulated his creative

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[176]Neff, "Beatniks' Search," sec. 2, p. 10. Perkoff discusses receiving financial assistance from Kenevan in journal no. 1 and mentions "Kenevan Row" in journal no. 25, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[177]Neff, "Beatniks Stay in Pads," sec. G, p. 5; and Neff, "Beatniks' Search," sec. 2, p. 10.

[178]Perkoff, journal nos. 37 and 31, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[179]Perkoff, journal nos. 25, 42 and 37, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

energies even when it was overrun by people with little apparent interest in art and literature. Similarly, frequent visitors valued the unconventional environment of the café. A UCLA student called it "a very relaxing place" where people came "to be alone" and where "you can dress anyway you want" but "nobody cares."[180] Another college student praised the café because "you can come and sit without being asked to buy something."[181] Public spaces like the Venice West Café provided environments in which individuals could disregard norms regarding clothing styles and conspicuous consumption, codes of behavior to which they conformed in many other parts of the urban landscape (such as the UCLA campus).

If café owners in Venice sought to support creative work and present poetry and painting to broader audiences, some of their counterparts in Hollywood shared the same goal regarding folk music, yet doing business in a more affluent part of L.A. meant catering to a more upscale clientele. In 1957, actor and folksinger Theodore Bikel decided that L.A. needed "a friendly niche for folksingers and their followers," a coffeehouse where performers and afficionados "could hang out and sing or play when they felt like it."[182] He and business partner Herb Cohen established the Unicorn on the Sunset Strip, serving nonalcoholic beverages and hanging a few guitars on the walls for

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[180]Jack Smith, "Flame Flickering Out for Beatniks," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1965, sec. 2, p. 3.

[181]Ibid.

[182]Theodore Bikel, *Theo: The Autobiography of Theodore Bikel* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 162, 161.

customers to play. As Bikel recalled, the Unicorn was "an immediate success" and often attracted customers who "brought their own instruments and sat, playing and singing for hours."[183] A second floor contained a bookstore that sold avant-garde paperbacks and paintings.[184] Beyond creating an environment conducive to discussing and performing folk music, Bikel wanted to "break down the demarcation lines" that separated the middle and upper classes in Hollywood, a district in which "the social strata were so strictly held apart" that "I had never seen anyone who made less than $50,000 a year as a guest in the house of someone who made $200,000 or more."[185] Bikel concluded that "folk music broke the barriers. On some nights you could see beards and sandals at the Unicorn sitting next to tuxedos and evening gowns."[186] After this initial success, Bikel and Cohen opened the Cosmo Alley, which was named after its location behind the Ivar Theatre in Hollywood.[187] The Cosmo Alley featured folk music but also poetry readings, jazz music and performances by comedians such as Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl.[188] Bikel and Cohen succeeded in large part because they could cater to the affluent residents of Hollywood,

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[183]Ibid.

[184]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

[185]Bikel, *Theo*, 162.

[186]Ibid.

[187]Ibid., 163.

[188]Lawrence Lipton Oral History Transcript, interviewed by Donald Schippers, Series 507, Partially Completed Transcripts and Audio Tapes, Oral History Program, Department of Special Collections, UCLA, 958, 960, 955; Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4.

which meant creating café settings that embellished the superficial accouterments of beatniks, with dark interiors and employees outfitted in all black clothing. The *Los Angeles Mirror News*, always sympathetic toward the beat generation, observed in the summer of 1958 that the Cosmo Alley was one of the "favorite" coffeehouses of L.A. beats, but a year later, amidst growing publicity devoted to the beat generation in southern California, the paper concluded that high prices now made the Cosmo Alley "way beyond the means of the beat artist or poet."[189] The *Mirror-News* opined that the management was "quick to realize the commercial possibilities of the 'beatnik' atmosphere. The waiters, waitresses and managers of all Cohen's places are required to dress in exaggerated 'beatnik' style to provide atmosphere for the 'square' eager to glimpse the beat world."[190] With a cover charge, over 20 varieties of coffee priced at 75 cents per cup, and $16 bottles of champaign, the Cosmo Alley clearly targeted an affluent clientele.[191] Yet Cohen insisted that his coffeehouses provided a supportive atmosphere for "those who are dissatisfied with society but don't know exactly where their dissatisfaction lies."[192] Such people made cafes their "homes" because in such climates, "not necessarily creativity, but understanding will get you" accepted by regular

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[189]Laro, "Beat Generation at Home," sec. 1, p. 4; Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks," sec. 2, p. 1.

[190]Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks," sec. 2, p. 1.

[191]Ibid.

[192]Morad, "Coffee Houses of America," 95.

customers, who constituted the "in-group" at particular coffeehouses.[193] In essence, Cohen and Bikel combined bohemian camaraderie and marketing savvy in attempting to create environments that were nurturing and welcoming but also trendy, chic and oriented toward consumers with ample disposable income.

The increasing number of coffeehouses in Los Angeles posed competition for nightclub owners, some of whom tried to capitalize on the growing market of teenage coffee drinkers.[194] The *Mirror News* reported that the increasing number of coffeehouses "alarmed the owners of night clubs [sic] and bars[,] who saw many of their customers drifting away," but as coffeehouses also drew "thousands of teenagers and college youths under 21 who could not be admitted to the bars and night clubs" that served liquor, some club owners promoted their establishments as wholesome environments that were perfectly suitable for young people.[195] When the *Mirror News* listed the Jazz Cellar in Hollywood as one of the "gathering places" of the beat generation, owner Terry Lester retorted that his club "has not and does not encourage 'beat' types as customers," but rather appealed to "business and professional people, high school and college students and actors and musicians of reputable standing."[196] Implicitly rebuking the vibrant jazz

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[193]Ibid.

[194]Beginning in the mid 1940s, advertisers and market researchers increasingly targeted teenagers as a distinct segment of consumers, a trend that intensified amidst the economic prosperity of the postwar decades. See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), xii-xx and chap. 7.

[195]Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks," sec. 2, p. 1.

[196]"The Mailbag," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 3 July 1958, sec. 1, p. 13.

scene that emerged in south-central Los Angeles in the 1940s, Lester insisted that "there is a place for real jazz outside dingy, smoky holes-in-the-wall" that fostered an "unhappy relationship to narcotics," and that the Jazz Cellar was "for upper-class jazz fans," a place "where parents will be glad to have their children spend an evening."[197] Thus some entrepreneurs simultaneously renounced the beat generation yet exploited the growing base of coffeehouse customers that itself derived in large part from popular interest in bohemianism. While café owners such as Kenevan and Matthews hoped that anyone interested in poetry and painting would frequent their businesses, entrepreneurs such as Cohen and Lester marketed folk and jazz performances to consumers with ample disposable income.

In addition to the cafes of Venice and the nightclubs of Hollywood, a small but vibrant coffeehouse scene emerged near Los Angeles City College. Located between Hollywood to the west and downtown to the southeast, the coffeehouses near this predominantly African American junior college attracted students and faculty, along with writers, artists and politicos from the nearby Silver Lake and Echo Park districts, as well as blues and folk musicians who sought places to hang out after their club performances.[198] In the early 1960s, Pogo's Swamp and the Xanadu began operation and

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[197]Ibid. On the jazz scene in L.A. at mid century, see Gioia, especially chaps. 6, 8 and 15, and Clora Bryant, Buddy Collette, William Green, Steven Isoardi, Jack Kelson, Horace Tapscott, Gerald Wilson, and Marl Young, eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[198]Racial intermixing among bohemians is examined at length in chap. 3 of this dissertation. Most African Americans who attended junior college in postwar Los Angeles went to LACC. See Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles*

quickly became two of the most popular coffeehouses in the area. Levi Kingston, an African American who grew up in south-central Los Angeles and developed a strong interest in music, founded Pogo's as an "alternative to bars," a "little hole in the wall" where people could hear live music, particularly folk and blues, without paying a cover charge or being expected to consume multiple rounds of expensive mixed drinks (Kingston served coffee and tea but not alcohol).[199] Not far from Pogo's, the Xanadu opened in a space previously occupied by a bookstore, and after the landlord expressed interest in a coffeehouse that offered books for sale, the management of the Xanadu kept thousands of volumes along the walls for customers to peruse.[200] Co-manager Lair Mitchell sought no specific clientele, but recalled that "we were always on the lookout for people with wit and grace who could contribute to the conversation."[201] Blues musicians (including Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry) who performed at nearby Hollywood clubs like the Troubador and the Ash Grove often hung out at the Xanadu after their shows, and thus impromptu performances occurred there.[202] Kingston and Mitchell set out not to exploit popular interest in avant-garde writers nor target affluent consumers but rather to create settings that fostered lively conversation and allowed people to hear music

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from the Great Depression to the Present (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 114.

[199]Personal interview with Levi Kingston, 14 June 2002.

[200]Rolfe, *Literary L.A.*, 14, 21.

[201]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 24.

[202]Ibid., 21, 25.

outside of bars. Recognizing that coffeehouses could prosper in the vicinity of a college and two bohemian districts, they established a middle ground between the singular devotion to art and literature of Venice entrepreneurs and the commercialism of some club owners in Hollywood.

As in other bohemian enclaves, many people felt a strong attraction to the coffeehouses near LACC. Lionel Rolfe began frequenting the Xanadu as a student at the college and recalled that "my coming of age" occurred at this coffeehouse, where people discussed "treasured" books like *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* by Henry Miller and "young disenchanted intellectuals" debated about art and politics.[203] Rolfe found the atmosphere of the Xanadu irresistible: "you had only to look at the Xanadu's walls lined with 5,000 books. The big comfortable sofas where people sat and talked, strummed guitars, sang (not too loudly), played chess or just read showed this was a place meant for a several hours long visit."[204] With students and faculty from LACC, artists and writers from Silver Lake and Echo Park, and musicians all hanging out at the same venue, the Xanadu achieved what Monty Muns, another habitue of L.A. coffeehouses, called "the confluence," as a broad cross-section of people interacted on a regular basis.[205] For Muns, "the Xanadu, like so many other bistros, served more than coffee on a Saturday

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[203]Ibid., 21; Rolfe, *Literary L.A.*, 163-164, 87.

[204]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 24-25.

[205]Ibid., 26.

night. It messed with your psyche and adjusted your thinking."[206] Furthermore, Rolfe noted that "the effect" of a place like the Xanadu "was not confined to its narrow walls–often one would merely go to the coffeehouse to learn where the parties were, for they all drew from that wellspring" which this urban district encompassed.[207] For individuals like Rolfe and Muns, the Xanadu functioned as a community center in which to interact with friends, meet new people and learn about upcoming social events.

Conclusion

Overall, bohemian entrepreneurship in Los Angeles and San Francisco was an ironic mixture of authenticity and exploitation. Individuals such as Al Matthews and John Kenevan, who could afford to subsidize their businesses with outside income, used their coffeehouses to support artists and writers by providing free meals and occasionally housing to poets and painters. In contrast, astute entrepreneurs such as Henri Lenoir and Herb Cohen exploited growing interest in the beat generation to lure customers who sought countercultural chic along with their beer or cappuccino. Business owners like Jay Hoppe, Levi Kingston and Lair Mitchell were most concerned with creating environments that stimulated conversation and would serve as casual hangouts for poets, musicians and their followers. However, while bar and café owners adopted widely varying means of running their businesses, they often shared the goal of making art, literature and music

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[206]Muns, "Loose Change," 5.

[207]Rolfe, *Literary L.A.*, 18.

available to broader audiences.

Moreover, the public spaces of enclaves in Los Angeles and San Francisco functioned as focal points for growing public interest in bohemianism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the best-selling works of beat writers and mass-media depictions of beatniks provided crucial indicators of this interest, the ways in which countercultural alternatives resonated with the broader public were most apparent within urban districts in which unconventional ideas and behavior were not only tolerated but encouraged. Although a wide variety of people found bohemian districts alluring, they often shared an unease with consumerism, the standardizing effects of the mass-media, and financially rewarding but intellectually vacuous careers, and thus sought new ways of finding individual fulfillment. However much journalists or "genuine" writers and artists scoffed at weekend bohemians and new residents of North Beach and Venice, the allure of bohemianism in postwar America centered not on a dedication to artistic or literary creativity but rather on a desire to participate in the adversarial cultures that flourished in cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Chapter 3
"I Want to Be with My Own Kind:" Homosexuality, Gender Relations and Racial Intermixing in Bohemian Countercultures

On the surface, postwar bohemianism seemed to be dominated by white men. In the novels of Jack Kerouac and the poems of Allen Ginsberg, women appear respectively as overbearing or mentally troubled mothers, and for Kerouac as sex objects, but rarely as intellectual equals.[1] African Americans resonated for many beat writers as exotic spectacles whose improvisational jazz provided a model for literary craftsmanship, but whose struggles against racism were utterly ignored.[2] Even the widely admired public affirmations of homosexuality by Ginsberg often appeared rooted in a gay machismo that marginalized women, whether straight or lesbian.[3] In short, bohemians of the late 1950s and early 1960s, at least the most famous among them, seemed to take what they wanted from the cultures of racial minorities, make self-righteous pretenses to gay pride, and leave their wives and girlfriends at home while they went on the road.

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[1]See especially Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), in which both sexism and racial exoticism motivate a protagonist who falls in love with a woman of mixed African American and American Indian descent, and Ginsberg's "Kaddish" (*Kaddish and Other Poems* [San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1961), in which the poet presents a passionate remembrance of his mentally disturbed mother. On the sexism that women associated with the beats confronted, see Alix Kates Shulman, "Women Writers in the Beat Generation," *Moody Street Irregulars* 28 (Fall 1994): 3-9.

[2]Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997); Lorenzo Thomas, "'Communicating by Horns:' Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement," *African American Review* 26 (Summer 1992): 291-298.

[3]Catharine R. Stimpson, "The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation," *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983): 373-392.

Bohemian countercultures were certainly not devoid of racism, sexism or homophobia, as white men and their prejudices exerted substantial influence on the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco. This was especially apparent concerning African Americans and women. Black bohemians remained a highly visible but numerically small segment of the bohemian communities in North Beach and Venice, and some whites believed that the supposed primitivism of African American culture, especially jazz, was an indispensable counterpoint to the conformity and mediocrity of the postwar years. Women were often marginalized in bohemian countercultures, filling conventional roles as mothers and housekeepers and sometimes serving as economic providers for men. Finally, the tendency of many heterosexual bohemians to take the presence of gays and lesbians for granted frequently meant that they failed to appreciate the extent to which homophobia pervaded the world outside of the urban niches in which avant-garde intellectuals congregated.

Nonetheless, bohemian countercultures challenged the racial segregation, restrictive gender roles and homophobia that pervaded postwar society. There was substantial overlap between the homosexual and bohemian cultures of North Beach and Venice, and bars and cafes in which poets and painters congregated often functioned as bi-social spaces that validated homosexuality without marking those present as sexually deviant.[4] Furthermore, many women moved to bohemian districts after abandoning

[4]In her history of queer culture in San Francisco, Nan Alamilla Boyd argues that homosexuals and bohemians in North Beach remained two separate communities, and that many gays and lesbians in San Francisco saw themselves and bohemians as distinct.

unsatisfying marriages and felt liberated by the experience of living independent of male authority, and a few asserted their intellectual equality with men.[5] Finally, racial intermixing was an important characteristic of postwar bohemianism, as Asian Americans, Latinos and especially African Americans participated in the social and intellectual life of urban countercultures. The extent to which minorities found acceptance among bohemians was always partial, contested and incomplete. Yet they gravitated to bohemian districts because, as one homosexual who frequented North Beach

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While Boyd is correct to note that two separate queer and bohemian cultures existed in North Beach, she underestimates the extent to which they overlapped, in part because conflates bohemianism in North Beach with beat writers such as Ginsberg and Kerouac. See Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 123-125. For an assessment of homosexual life in San Francisco during the 1950s that emphasizes the importance of the beats, including the significant overlap of homosexual and bohemian cultures in the city, see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 177-182, 185. While homosexuals and bohemians certainly formed distinct groups, there was significant intersection between the two in many public spaces in North Beach, and homosexuality was an important component of postwar bohemianism.

[5]The simultaneous empowerment and subordination of women is a key theme in twentieth century American bohemianism. On gender relations among Greenwich Village bohemians in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), chaps. 7 and 8; and Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love: Greenwich Village, 1900-1925," in Ann Snitnow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 131-152. On the relationship between feminists and the hippie counterculture, see Debra Michals, "From 'Consciousness Expansion' to 'Consciousness Raising:' Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41-68. On hippie masculinity, see Tim Hodgdon, "Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2002).

on weekends observed, "I want to be with my own kind."[6]

Homosexuality and Bohemian Countercultures

The 1950s and early 1960s was a time of intense and institutionalized homophobia, yet it was also a moment when homosexuals founded the first gay and lesbian civil rights organizations and continued to establish communities in urban enclaves throughout America. Cold War anti-Communism created an environment in which sexual "perversion" became synonymous with domestic subversion, and the federal government launched campaigns against homosexuals.[7] However, during this time gay men launched the Mattachine Society and lesbians founded the Daughters of Bilitis, the first homosexual rights groups in the United States.[8] Moreover, the mobilization of millions of troops during World War II and the gender segregation of military bases enabled young gays and lesbians to seek each other out and express their sexual orientation. In turn, postwar demobilization concentrated substantial numbers of

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[6]Allen Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," *This World* (Sunday magazine supplement to *San Francisco Chronicle*), 22 June 1958, p. 6.

[7]John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge), 57-73; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[8]D'Emilio, "Dreams Deferred: The Birth and Betrayal of America's First Gay Liberation Movement," in *Making Trouble*, 17-56; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chaps. 4 and 5.

gays and lesbians in port cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, and many chose to stay in such urban areas and strengthen the networks that they had already established with other homosexuals.[9] This led to the growth of homosexual districts and the growing importance of gay and lesbian bars as community centers in which homosexuals began to articulate and enact more politicized identities.[10] As the intense homophobia of the postwar years forced most homosexuals to remain closeted to many friends, family members and co-workers, urban public spaces in which homosexuals congregated took on growing significance both personally and politically for gays and lesbians.

In San Francisco, many of these public spaces first appeared in North Beach during the 1930s, and the homosexual subculture that developed there was closely intertwined with the bohemian milieu of the district. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Barbary Coast section of North Beach was the most notorious red-light districts in San Francisco, and with the repeal of Prohibition, bars and nightclubs opened in the area that exploited this legacy of salacious entertainment.[11] Finocchio's first operated as a speakeasy in the 1920s, and in the following decade the club featured musical performances by female impersonators, while Mona's bar presented male

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[9]Allan Berube, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

[10]On the role of queer public spaces in the development of more politicized identities among gays and lesbians, see Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

[11]Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast* (New York: Knopf, 1933; reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, n.d., 98-99; Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 48.

impersonation as entertainment.[12] By the 1950s, bars and nightclubs in North Beach attracted an eclectic mix of gay men, lesbians, local poets and painters, and heterosexual tourists. Many such establishments were "queer" in that it they were not exclusively homosexual or heterosexual nor solely gay or lesbian but rather were variegated environments that publicly legitimized same-sex attraction and gender-inappropriate behavior.[13] Queer bars and nightclubs allowed straight tourists to experience the exoticism of male and female impersonation and simultaneously enabled gays and lesbians to intermingle publicly in environments known for blurring the boundaries between hetero- and homosexuality.[14] Furthermore, the queer social life of North Beach was closely intertwined with the bohemian counterculture of the district.[15] Mona Sargent established Mona's bar in the early 1930s as a hangout her artist and writer friends, the "mad bohemians" with whom she socialized, but the venue quickly attracted many of the lesbians who lived in North Beach.[16] Although married to a man, Sargent was "not

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[12]Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 52-53, 100.

[13]Ibid., 6-7.

[14]Ibid., 2, 5-6, 75.

[15]D'Emilio, "Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience," in *Making Trouble*, 80-81. For a discussion of debates among historians regarding the significance of bohemianism in the development of urban gay communities, see the introduction.

[16]Reba Hudson, a lesbian who frequented Mona's, qtd. in Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 64. On the emergence of Mona's as the first lesbian bar in San Francisco, see Boyd, "'Homos Invade S.F.!' San Francisco's History as a Wide-Open Town," in Brett Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81-83.

offended at how the other fellow lives, that's why I was a true bohemian."[17] A lesbian who frequented North Beach bars in the 1940s affirmed that Sargent "was never interested in running a gay place" but came to do so because of the "tolerance in North Beach."[18] Another popular queer bar in North Beach was the Black Cat, whose manager sought to make it "the most popular place in bohemia."[19] Jose Sarria, a gay singer and political activist who performed at the Black Cat in the 1950s and 1960s, recalled decades later that the establishment "was not a gay bar as we today know gay bars," because the clientele included not only homosexuals but also writers, artists and tourists who patronized public spaces that legitimized unconventional behavior.[20] For Sarria, the Black Cat "was a bohemian bar where women smoked in public, where people believed in free love, where there were artists wanting to talk about their artwork."[21] Similarly, a lesbian who frequented Mona's Candlelight, 12 Adler Place and the Black Cat in the 1950s considered such venues "gay" because many homosexual men and women hung out there, but she noted that "a *lot* of straight people" were present as well.[22] Thus queer

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[17]Qtd. in Boyd, "'Homos Invade S.F.!" 81.

[18]Qtd. in Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 65.

[19]Qtd. in ibid., 56.

[20]Qtd. in ibid., 23.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Mildred Dickemann, "Coming to Cal, 1950," oral history transcript, interviewed in 1996 by William Benemann, University of California at Berkeley, p. 11. Emphasis is Dickemann's.

life in North Beach was rooted in bohemianism, and the two reinforced each other both economically and culturally, as tourists and weekend visitors subsidized public spaces in which both homosexuals and avant-garde intellectuals interacted with like-minded individuals.

One manifestation of this overlap was the pervasive assumption that homosexuality constituted a key component of bohemianism in San Francisco. One woman who frequented North Beach on weekends affirmed that "I won't go all the way with the Beat Generation," in part because "I like to date men, not women."[23] Similarly, the heterosexual writer Jerry Kamstra recalled "the openness of alternatives to straight sex" among bohemians and noted that "homosexual couples were known and respected on the Beach, not for their sexual proclivities, but for who they were."[24] Kamstra believed that "homosexuality was one preference that was accepted by the bohemian crowd."[25] More succinctly, the African American painter Arthur Monroe concluded that homosexuality simply "didn't matter" to straight bohemians like himself.[26] The tendency among heterosexuals such as Kamstra, Monroe and Mona Sargent to judge people based not on their sexual orientation but rather on "who they were" as individuals formed a key

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[23]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6.

[24]Jerry Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950-1980* (no place: Peer Amid Press, 1980), chap. 9, p. 88, 90-91. Pagination for this self-published typescript is incomplete, and thus chapters are cited along with page numbers when available.

[25]Ibid., chap. 9, p. 91.

[26]Personal interview with Arthur Monroe, Oakland, California, 1 August 2002.

basis for the intersection of queer and bohemian communities in North Beach. Just as homosexuals like Jose Sarria recognized the centrality of bohemianism in the queer culture of San Francisco, so heterosexual artists and writers assumed that homosexuality was a central component of bohemian life.

Bohemian sexuality often centered not on a particular orientation but rather on an openness to experimentation. Of thirty-three men interviewed for a sociological study of the beat generation in North Beach, only one identified as exclusively homosexual, and five had previously been in long term relationships with a male partner.[27] Furthermore, twelve of the thirty-three had engaged in sexual activity with other men, which most often consisted of receiving oral sex, either for money or "to try the experiment."[28] As Kamstra observed, "many of the artists were bisexual–or just sexual," suggesting that however individuals labeled their orientation, bohemian sexuality was substantially premised on receptiveness to varied experiences.[29] The sociological study also noted that "social homosexuality–'gay bars,' 'gay parties'– is *not* part of this Bohemian scene," indicating that individuals who considered themselves bohemians were not attracted to public spaces regarded primarily hangouts for gays or lesbians (such as the Paper Doll or the Copper Lantern) but rather gravitated toward venues with a more mixed clientele (such as

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[27]Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith, *The Real Bohemia: A Sociological and Psychological Study of the "Beats"* (New York: Basic Books, 1961), 48. Rigney and Smith do not discuss lesbianism among North Beach bohemians.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 9, p. 91.

the Black Cat or the Place).[30] The desire to "try the experiment," to be "just sexual" and to frequent public areas where both hetero- and homosexuals congregated was a key component of bohemian attitudes toward sexuality: avant-garde intellectuals did not necessarily valorize an exclusive orientation and often sought diverse environments in which same-sex attraction was one form of unconventional behavior.

However, not all bohemians were comfortable with homosexuality, and some were homophobic. The sociological study reported that one straight man called homosexuality "very putrid, weak, and offensive," "a parody in nature."[31] Although many straight bohemians accepted the presence of gays and lesbians in North Beach, others harbored intense animosity toward homosexuals. Moreover, the study found that some bohemians questioned their sexual orientation but could not accept being homosexual. Three men displayed "sexual conflicts," including a "fear of homosexuality," and engaged in sex with other men only while drunk.[32] One such man felt love for women but continued to have sex with men when intoxicated.[33] The study further noted that some men who experienced "sexual confusion" also expressed a "distrust of women," while others were "defensive about their masculinity."[34] Nor were

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[30]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 48, emphasis in original.

[31]Ibid., 114.

[32]Ibid., 79, 77.

[33]Ibid., 76.

[34]Ibid., 112, 74.

such concerns limited to men, as one woman expressed "concerns about her sexual identity, about accepting femininity, and about being 'worth while.'"[35] Thus some gay and lesbian bohemians remained incapable of accepting their sexual orientation, often resorting to alcohol abuse to repress their homophobia. Furthermore, some bohemians linked homosexuality with a failure to maintain personas as masculine men or feminine women, demonstrating that urban countercultures were not immune to pressures to uphold conventional gender roles and identities. In short, although many people, gay and straight, recognized that homosexuality was one component of countercultural life in North Beach, some bohemians remained homophobic in their attitudes toward others and themselves.

A key manifestation of the overlap between homosexual and bohemian communities in San Francisco was that gay intellectuals often incorporated sexuality into their creative work and used bars and cafes in North Beach as forums in which to publicize their orientation. The Co-Existence Bagel Shop was not regarded as a gay hangout, yet Kamstra noted that in the late 1950s Taylor Mead (who in later years joined the entourage of Andy Warhol) often read "homosexual poetry" there, "describing in intimate detail" his sexual exploits.[36] Indeed, Kamstra recalled that Mead was "verbally vocal as a gay poet in the old Bagel Shop and other places."[37] The tendency of gay poets

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[35]Ibid., 117.

[36]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4, p. 41.

[37]Ibid., chap. 9, p. 90-91. This phrase is crossed out on one page but appears intact on the next.

to publicly proclaim their orientation was an inside joke for some bohemians, and straight intellectuals occasionally satirized the tendency of their homosexual counterparts to form cliques. The openly gay poets Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer were among the most widely respected writers in the San Francisco "renaissance" of the 1950s, and at one Blabbermouth Night (held every Monday at the Place), Berkeley English professor Thomas Parkinson satirized Duncan, Spicer and homosexual poetry in general.[38] His monologue was entitled "Do Not Dig Homosexual Poetry" and announced that "we have nothing against homosexuals, nothing against homosexuals who write poetry, but we *do* have something against" literary cliques of gay men, who produced "poetry written by a small circle for a small circle" and who "don't like anybody else to come in and find out what's happening."[39] As with most Blabbermouth performances, the tone was jovial, with Spicer and Duncan parodied as "Lady Superior Spice" and "Archbishop Drumcan," which elicited substantial laughter from the crowd. Spicer frequented the Place, and the fact that both he and Duncan were widely known within Bay Area literary circles meant that many audience members probably recognized who was being spoofed. Parkinson knew and respected both Spicer and Duncan, and his Blabbermouth satire was certainly not meant as a serious complaint (Spicer had impressed Parkinson with his intellectual

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[38]On the postwar ferment in Bay Area literature, see Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and Warren French, *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, 1955-1960* (Boston: Twayne, 1991).

[39]"'Blabbermouth Night' at the Place," 15 April 1957 (Intelirap Records, 2002). Parkinson's monologue was read by someone else because he had laryngitis.

zeal as a graduate student at Berkeley).[40] What Parkinson's piece did reveal was the extent to which gay intellectuals such as Duncan and Spicer created public roles for themselves among North Beach bohemians as respected poets whose sexual orientation often influenced both their writing and the literary coteries to which they belonged. Furthermore, the fact that poets like Mead highlighted their sexuality at readings and straight bohemians poked fun at their gay counterparts at Blabbermouth Night demonstrated that bohemian public spaces functioned as arenas that legitimized homosexuality: neither the Bagel Shop nor the Place were regarded as gay venues per se, yet they served as environments for the discussion of homosexuality. Whether such discussions were serious or satirical, the salient point was that they frequently occurred in places where both gays and straights interacted.

This affirmation of homosexuality brought many gays and lesbians to North Beach on weekends. As an undergraduate at Berkeley in the early 1950s, Erwin Kelly struggled to confront his sexual identity.[41] Outside of North Beach, "There was no positive reenforcement to be found, anywhere. I mean, the nearest you came was when

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[40]On Spicer's relationship with Parkinson and on the Place as one of his favorite hangouts, see Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 16, 25, 99-100. On Robert Duncan's role in the Renaissance, French, *San Francisco Poetry Renaissance*, xvii, 17-19.

[41]Erwin Kelly, "Gay Life at Berkeley in the 1950s: 'Miss Scarlett, I Don't Know Nothin' about Bein' Gay!'" oral history transcript, interviewed in 1996 by William Benemann, University of California at Berkeley, p. ix-vi, 6.

you went to a place like Finocchio's."[42] This need for "positive reenforcement" meant that "for anybody who was gay at that time," a bar like the Black Cat "was indeed a breath of fresh air," because in such spaces "you didn't *have* to feel you were gay," but "you could be comfortable" in an environment that encouraged same-sex attraction yet included heterosexuals as well as homosexuals.[43] During such excursions, "you'd probably get a proposition" for sex from one of the customers, but "The most important thing going on was everybody laughing and talking," the "good music on the juke box" and the live performances.[44] For Kelly, the goal was not to find a sexual partner but rather to enjoy the ambience of a bar that provided good music and conversation yet also created a positive climate for homosexuals. Furthermore, Kelly recalled that there was "always a little straight element at the Black Cat," and "I used to take [heterosexual] fraternity brothers, and they used to love to go."[45] Bohemian public spaces enabled a closeted homosexual like Kelly and his heterosexual fraternity brothers to interact in settings that blurred the boundaries of gender-appropriate behavior and normative sexual attraction. Kelly came to the Black Cat not to find a sex partner but rather to enjoy stimulating conversation and lively music in an environment that validated homosexuality but contained both gay and straight people, and he found affirmation for same-sex desire

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[42]Ibid., 4.

[43]Ibid., 4-5. Emphasis is Kelly's.

[44]Ibid., 5.

[45]Ibid., 4-5.

without revealing his orientation. Thus public spaces like the Black Cat provided an important means of circumventing the intense homophobia of the 1950s.

The extent to which bohemian public spaces validated homosexuality without marking those present as gay or lesbian was a central factor in bringing homosexuals to North Beach. For some homosexuals, bohemian public spaces provided a liberating potential that was difficult to sustain in other parts of San Francisco. One closeted man noted that

> Some guys hang out all the time in gay bars. Looking for new friends, mostly. I can't. I can't risk it. I have a good job and I don't want to lose it. So all week long, I'm straight. I talk baseball and I take girls out for dinner and maybe even dancing. But by the week end [sic], the masquerade gets to be too much. I want to be with my own kind. So I pull on an old sweater and come into the Beach and have dinner in one of the gay little restaurants and just look around and realize I'm not alone.[46]

For this individual, the most appealing public environments validated homosexuality without stigmatizing people as sexually deviant or "perverted." If a co-worker happened to see this man entering or exiting venues like the Bagel Shop, the Place, or the Black Cat, that alone would not mark him as homosexual. Yet he felt connected to his "own kind" in such environments because they affirmed his sexual orientation by legitimizing unconventionality in general: he did not need to "talk baseball" or exhibit other signs of normative masculinity in arenas in which disregarding such norms was taken for granted.

Many homosexuals who frequented North Beach did not identify as writers or artists but nonetheless felt a strong affinity for the bohemian milieu. Kelly recalled that

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[46]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6.

"North Beach was really a central focus of everything we did. We all loved it," and "if you had asked us what we were, we would have said, 'bohemian.' That would have been a good word. We wouldn't have said we were Beats, because you didn't feel 'beat.'"[47] Kelly met Kerouac on several occasions through a mutual lesbian friend, but concluded that the aspiring novelist "wasn't impressive. He was not someone you paid any attention to:" "I mean, everybody *wrote*, everybody *painted*, right? But you know, so what?"[48] Assessing his relationship to the bohemian milieu, Kelly noted that he and his friends "were not *committed*, but we loved it" and "were really plugged into" the social life of North Beach.[49] As with other frequent visitors, homosexuals like Kelly did not have to be devoted to artistic or literary creativity in order to participate in the countercultural life of North Beach.[50]

Unlike North Beach, Venice was not a focal point of gay life in Los Angeles, yet the bohemian milieu of the district nonetheless validated homosexuality. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Venice had fewer gay and lesbian bars than North Beach, and Los Angeles lacked a single area that served as the main gay district of the city to the extent that North Beach did in San Francisco. Queer bars were scattered throughout L.A.,

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[47]Kelly, "Gay Life at Berkeley," 24-25.

[48]Ibid., 22-23. Emphasis is Kelly's.

[49]Ibid., 24-25. Emphasis is Kelly's.

[50]For an analysis of the role of weekend visitors who did not identify as artists or writers in the development of bohemianism in North Beach and Venice, see chap. 2 of this dissertation.

including the Sunset Strip, Hollywood, Silver Lake and Venice.[51] One result was that the queer presence in bohemian public spaces of L.A. was less pronounced than in North Beach. John Haag, who owned the Venice West Café, noted that homosexuals frequented his establishment but that they were "pretty discreet" and "weren't flaunting" their orientation.[52] Similarly, the writer Lionel Rolfe noted that the Xanadu, a coffeehouse near Los Angeles City College, attracted a few openly homosexual customers and that this was "no big deal" for the predominantly straight clientele.[53] As Haag and Rolfe revealed, whether homosexuals were open regarding their orientation or closeted, their presence in bars and coffeehouses where writers and artists congregated was taken for granted by both the management and the customers. Indeed, bohemians in L.A. often assumed that homosexuality was one component of the bohemian milieu. The straight photographer Charles Brittin recalled that among poets and painters in L.A. during the 1950s and 1960s, "Homosexuality was completely accepted," to the extent that "it wasn't even deemed worthy of discussion."[54] Significantly, some homosexuals found Venice appealing precisely because they found acceptance among bohemians yet did not live in an area considered to have a large homosexual presence. One man fled a vice-squad raid

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[51]Moira Rachel Kennedy, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 45.

[52]Personal interview with John Haag, Los Angeles, California, 24 April 2002.

[53]Personal interview with Lionel Rolfe, Los Angeles, California, 9 August 2001.

[54]Kristine McKenna, "Way Out West: A Conversation with Charles Brittin," in *Charles Brittin*, (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1999), 13.

on a gay bar in another part of the city and moved to Venice hoping to avoid further confrontations with the police. The heterosexual writer Lawrence Lipton, with characteristic exaggeration, asserted that among the poets and painters in the district, this man "found complete acceptance on a no-questions-asked basis for the first time in his life" as "a member ex-officio of the beat generation."[55] Another straight writer agreed, insisting that "nobody can belong to an illegal sex, man, and be square. He's the *beatest* of the beat!"[56] Despite the fact that Venice was not a gay enclave per se, many intellectuals in the district took the presence of homosexuals for granted.

However, such acceptance meant that straight bohemians sometimes failed to appreciate the prejudice that their gay counterparts encountered in the broader society. This was especially true in Venice, which had a smaller homosexual presence than North Beach and fewer networks of openly gay artists and writers (in contrast to the cadres of Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan in San Francisco). A case in point was the response among Venice intellectuals to the suicide of the gay painter Fowad Magdalani. He was known as "Mad Mike," in part because of his intense devotion to painting but also because he seemed, as one associate recalled, to be driven by "desperation," and "when he'd come in the Venice West [Café] and read what he had written, and brought his paintings, I guess people got into the habit of just putting it down as Mad Mike and

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[55]Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), 136.

[56]Ibid.

laughing ill."[57] After struggling with depression, Magdalani hung himself in his studio in 1961.[58] Reflecting on his death, the poet Stuart Perkoff noted that Magdalani confronted the "problem of homosexuality," and Lipton opined that he tried "more successfully than any of us would imagine to overcome the sex instinct."[59] Yet both Lipton and Perkoff concluded that his suicide was ultimately rooted in a loss of faith in his artistic ability. Lipton believed that Magdalani underwent psychological counseling to "find an answer in something like *normal*," so that "the world would give him what he needed for his art," but then "found out that this doesn't do it."[60] For Lipton, this desire for normality centered not on sexual orientation but rather on a need for validation as a painter. Similarly, Perkoff could not understand how so much "devotion and love of the art" was not "life positive enough to balance, no matter what other problems" existed.[61] For both Lipton and Perkoff, the psychological struggles Magdalani faced were rooted in his

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[57]On Magdalani as "mad Mike," see *Beatnik Dictionary & Who's Who in Venice West* (Venice, CA: Beat Scene Press, 1960), n. p. The quote regarding "laughing ill" is from a tape recorded conversation between Lawrence Lipton, Nettie Lipton, Stuart Perkoff, Tony Scibella, and Jimmy Morris, 1 June 1962, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Collection No. 100, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles.

[58]Conversation with Lipton, Perkoff, et al, 1 June 1962. See also John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 146-7. Maynard discusses Magdalani but does not analyze the role of sexuality in either his psychological troubles or his suicide, nor does he assess the role of homosexuality in the Venice counterculture.

[59]Conversation with Lipton, Perkoff, et al, 1 June 1962.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid.

identity as an artist, and this seemed the most important factor in his suicide, not any "other problems" that he might have confronted. In taking for granted the existence of homosexuals within the bohemian milieu, heterosexual intellectuals such as Lipton and Perkoff failed to appreciate the possibility that the desire of Magdalani to attain "something like normal" was rooted in his sexual orientation as well as his artistic aspirations.

Similarly, the Venice writer Charles Foster struggled to accept his homosexuality. Born into an affluent New England family, he attended Colgate on a scholarship, did graduate work at Boston University and Harvard, was honorably discharged from the military after serving in World War II, and then began a promising career in the advertising industry. In the mid 1940s he married and eventually had three children, but the marriage collapsed as Foster became increasingly alienated from his wife, his career and society in general.[62] Foster had the acumen to succeed in advertising, but after years in the profession he discovered that "I couldn't take that kind of work seriously enough any longer."[63] He traveled throughout the U.S. and Mexico, working at both white and blue collar jobs and drinking heavily. He divorced his wife and in the mid 1950s moved

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[62]Maynard, *Venice West*, 83-85. Maynard once mentions Foster's "confused sexuality" (p. 86) but does not elaborate on homosexuality as an issue in Foster's life.

[63]Charles Foster, untitled manuscript, no date, p. 29, box 5, "Foster, Charles–Folder I," Lawrence Lipton Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter cited as Lipton Papers, UCLA). Maynard concluded that this manuscript was "probably" written in 1959 (*Venice West*, 208). A second folder in the Lipton Papers contains autobiographical writings by Foster that are dated from 1957, so the manuscript quoted here is likely from the late 1950s as well.

to Los Angeles, where his mother lived. There he got yet another job with an advertising firm and began hanging out in Venice on weekends.[64] The alienation that Foster felt was inextricably tied to his repressed homosexuality. At an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting he "came face to face with my homosexual nature" for the first time, realizing that "I could not kill myself by drinking alcohol."[65] Although in sober moments Foster could, at least briefly, confront his true sexual orientation, he still struggled to convince himself that he was straight and to present a heterosexual facade to other people, which led inevitably to frustration and binge drinking. In one of his unpublished autobiographical writings from the late 1950s, he inscribed this sexual repression within the text itself. In the first sentence he proclaimed "The last time I was fucked in the ass was about six months ago in Mexico City," and then narrated a series of subplots and tangents that led up to the event 45 pages later.[66] At one point he interrupted the narrative to note that "The subject of this discourse being homosexuality, more or less, my own still half-repressed memories of lush-drowned and memory-blackened scenes" of having sex with other men, suggesting that the very act of writing constituted another arena in which he struggled with his sexual identity.[67] Foster did not discuss his homosexual encounter

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[64]Maynard, *Venice West*, 83-85.

[65]Foster, untitled manuscript, 14 November 1957, n.p., box 5, "Foster, Charles–Folder II," Lipton Papers, UCLA.

[66]Foster, untitled manuscript, no date, p. 1, box 5, "Foster, Charles–Folder I," Lipton Papers, UCLA.

[67]Ibid., 12.

until the final pages of the manuscript, where he explained that "It is not the act of which I am ashamed. It is the shuck, the false sense of sin, the lousy stinking aura of evil" that "has been overlaid like a poison fog, a mist over this and every natural act of love" in his life.[68] The other man left after the encounter, Foster slept peacefully for "the first night in a long, long time," and in the morning he "remembered the scene vaguely, as if through a curtain, a mist."[69] His recurring use of "mist," along with "fog," "curtain" and "aura" connoted a hidden meaning to this event, one that he sensed and glimpsed but could not confront. That morning he expected to feel "the sense of having committed some overwhelming and nameless evil," as he had after other homosexual encounters, and he explained the lack of such emotion by insisting that "this was not a homosexual experience."[70] Yet he acknowledged that "the guilt and the shame and the fear and the dread have grown in the months that have passed since then, the sick feelings not engendered by the act but by the sick society in which I live."[71] The fact that his guilt was "not engendered by the act" suggested that Foster, at least on some level, believed that homosexuality itself was not shameful and that being attracted to men was not perverted. However, the "false sense of sin" brought about by his inability to reject the norms of a "sick society" made him profoundly repentant for homosexuality, despite feeling that it

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[68]Ibid., 46-47.

[69]Ibid., 49.

[70]Ibid., 50.

[71]Ibid.

was his true orientation.

Foster found acceptance among some bohemians in Venice yet always remained a marginal figure amidst the tight-knit intellectual coteries of the district. He began frequenting Venice in 1956 and immediately came to the attention of Lipton, who was planning a book on contemporary bohemianism and viewed Foster, with his upperclass background and once promising advertising career, as an archetype of someone who renounced affluence to seek authentic meaning and happiness. Soon Foster was sending Lipton poems on ad agency stationery and crashing in Venice pads on weekends.[72] Had Foster arrived three years later, when *The Holy Barbarians* put Venice on the map of American bohemias, the local intelligentsia would probably have regarded him as just one of the tourist slummers who increasingly frequented the district. Instead, he was esteemed as promising writer, and one of his short stories was published by *Evergreen Review*, one of the first avant-garde quarterlies to champion the beats.[73] Perkoff recognized his literary potential and even quoted one of his comments about poetry approvingly in his journal, a sure sign that Perkoff admired someone.[74] Foster felt a strong attraction to the district, once observing that "I died in Venice and I was born in

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[72]Maynard, *Venice West*, 86.

[73]Foster, "The Troubled Makers," *Evergreen Review* 1.4 (1957): 9-28.

[74]Perkoff, journal no. 30, Stuart Z. Perkoff Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter cited as Perkoff Papers, UCLA).

Venice. And it is the world of Venice that I would know and love."[75] However, many Venetians disliked his obvious need for acceptance and his tendency to talk endlessly when drunk, and by the mid 1960s even Perkoff complained that Foster was becoming a nuisance.[76] He drifted in and out of the Venice scene for a decade while wandering throughout America and Mexico.[77] To a significant extent, the marginal status that Foster held among Venice bohemians was rooted in his repressed sexuality, as he desperately struggled both to convince himself that he was straight and to maintain a heterosexual facade for Venetians. At one point he became infatuated with a woman but acknowledged in his journal that "It is a real effort for me to visualize a sexual scene between us."[78] Although in his journals Foster could, at least briefly, confront his sexual orientation, he still struggled to convince himself that he was straight. Furthermore, he did not discuss his sexual orientation with other Venetians.[79] Overall, Foster starkly

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[75]Foster manuscript, 14 November 1957, n.p., box 5, "Foster, Charles–Folder II," Lipton Papers, UCLA.

[76]Perkoff, journal no. 38, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[77]Perkoff, journal no. 28, Perkoff Papers, UCLA; Maynard, *Venice West*, 148, 173.

[78]Foster manuscript, 14 November 1957, n.p., box 5, "Foster, Charles–Folder II," Lipton Papers, UCLA.

[79]Perkoff never noted Foster's homosexuality in his journals, and more importantly no one mentioned Foster during the tape-recorded conversation concerning the suicide of Magdalani. Lipton prided himself both on staying abreast of current happenings within the intellectual colony of Venice and on pontificating about the significance of even the most minor events to anyone who would listen. Had he known Foster was homosexual, he almost certainly would have discussed it during a conversation that included Perkoff and other writers. Finally, Foster does not mention having discussed his homosexuality with Venetians in his autobiographical manuscripts.

exemplified the limits of the bohemian affirmation of homosexuality. Despite attaining recognition for his writing and a modicum of acceptance as a friend, his inability to acknowledge his sexual orientation forced him to present a facade for everyone else, whether poets at a café or co-workers at an ad agency, which resulted in alcoholism, loneliness, and failed careers in advertising and literature. Had Foster overcome his homophobia, he might well have used literary expression and bohemian camaraderie as a source of support and empowerment, and issued public proclamations of his sexual orientation as writers in North Beach so often did. Instead, homosexuality functioned for Foster as an inner demon that he could never fully acknowledge and that other Venice intellectuals never began to appreciate.

However, individuals who could accept their homosexuality often found that Venice legitimized their orientation. This was the case for Erwin Kelly, who moved to Venice in the early 1960s after he graduated from Berkeley, served in the military and attended graduate school at Tulane.[80] After arriving in L.A., Kelly concluded that "everything from North Beach had moved" to Venice, including cafes like the Gas House and the Venice West and gay hangouts like the Forty Thieves, "So I just picked up where I had dropped the ball" in San Francisco.[81] In sharp contrast to Magdalani and Foster, Kelly was closeted but less conflicted regarding his sexual orientation, and a year after

[80]Kelly, "Gay Life at Berkeley," ix-xi.

[81]Ibid., 24.

moving to Venice he made a "full commitment" to being homosexual.[82] Furthermore, his years frequenting North Beach provided ample experience in seeking out public spaces that validated same-sex attraction, and thus he quickly gravitated toward gay bars in Venice and immersed himself in the overlapping bohemian and queer cultures of the district. He recalled that "I'd followed the 'Beats'–Venice West (poetry and jazz), Big Daddy Eric Nord's Gashouse [sic] and five gay bars were in my front yard. Had open house 2-3 times a month: artists, Beats, writers, composers, weight lifters, young UCLA professors, grad students, bright undergrads."[83] The divergent experiences of Magdalani and Foster on the one hand and Kelly on the other suggested that both the internal dynamics of intellectual coteries in specific urban districts and the idiosyncracies of individual psychology were equally influential in determining how homosexuals experienced life in bohemian enclaves. Magdalani and Foster repressed their sexual orientation, and the predominantly heterosexual intellectuals with whom they interacted accepted the presence of gays and lesbians but tended to view psychological turmoil as part of the perennial struggle of artists to find meaning and contentment in bourgeois society. Kelly did not identify as a writer or artist and thus did not look to the intellectual cadres of Perkoff and Lipton for camaraderie. Instead, he carved out a place for himself within the intersecting bohemian and homosexual milieux of Venice, a task greatly facilitated by both his growing acceptance of his orientation and his previous experience

[82]Ibid., 6.

[83]Ibid., vi-vii.

in North Beach. Furthermore, the ability of Kelly to immerse himself in the countercultural life of both North Beach and Venice indicated that some homosexuals gravitated toward bohemian districts throughout their lives in order to find legitimacy for their sexual orientation amidst the intense homophobia of the postwar years.

Racial Intermixing among Bohemians

Racial intermixing played a crucial role in the development of postwar bohemianism. One of the most important features of race relations among avant-garde intellectuals was the white appropriation of African American culture, particularly jazz music and performance. In many instances, white writers venerated musicians such as Charlie Parker but exhibited neither an understanding of African American cultural history nor a concern with the realities of racial oppression.[84] White appropriation of black culture almost always perpetuated racism, as whites valorized and stereotyped those segments of African American life that seemed most relevant in their own lives. Furthermore, bohemian communities in North Beach and Venice were not racially integrated, as African Americans constituted a highly visible but numerically small segment of urban countercultures. Finally, substantial divisions existed among white and black bohemians regarding sexual relationships between African American men and white women, which some white men regarded with a mixture of jealousy and hatred. Nonetheless, bohemian countercultures challenged racial segregation by legitimizing

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[84]Panish, *Color of Jazz*, especially chaps. 3 and 4.

public interactions between whites and blacks. Many whites felt a genuine desire to interact with African Americans in bohemian enclaves, not merely as a means to enact their rejection of white middle-class norms but also as a way to counter racial segregation, at least in their daily lives. Moreover, some racial minorities participated in bohemian countercultures as writers, artists and scenesters along with whites. At a time when the civil rights movement brought race relations to the center of American political life, many bohemians, white and black, found significance in the racial intermixing that occurred in bohemian enclaves.

Like many major cities in postwar America, San Francisco was both very diverse and highly segregated. Hunter's Point, in the southeastern part of the city, had a large black population, and most of the African Americans who migrated to San Francisco during World War II settled either there or in the Fillmore district, located a few miles west of North Beach.[85] In contrast, North Beach was a predominantly white area that included a large number of Italian Americans, and the district bordered Chinatown, one of the largest Asian American communities in the nation. The fact that San Francisco was simultaneously multiracial and very segregated played a central role in how bohemians perceived racial intermixing in North Beach.

The proximity of North Beach to Chinatown meant that intermixing occurred

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[85]Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 105; Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansans, 1993), 179, 240.

between whites and Asian Americans, but the latter group often had very different experiences in the local counterculture. White poets and painters hung out at bars and restaurants in Chinatown, including establishments like Li Po, Nam Yuen and Sun Hung Heung, and Sam Wo (to which Ginsberg and others repaired after the historic first reading of "Howl" in 1955).[86] In the 1950s, one of the most well-known Asian American bohemians in North Beach was Shigeyoshi Murao, a second generation Japanese immigrant who was interned during World War II. Murao began working at City Lights in its second year of operation, and he quickly impressed Ferlinghetti as "one of the most well-read, literate book men I ever ran across."[87] In later years Murao managed the store, and he was arrested in 1957 when the San Francisco Police filed obscenity charges against City Lights for selling *Howl and Other Poems*.[88] However, if Murao was at the center of the North Beach bohemian scene, Victor Wong often felt like a marginal figure. Born into an influential Chinese American family (his father once served as an adviser to Chiang Kai-Shek), Wong angered his parents by pursing acting and painting instead of

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[86]Bill Morgan, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2003), 38-40. On the poets of the Six Gallery reading who later went to Sam Wo, see Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 216. Rigney and Smith, in their study of San Francisco beats, concluded that there were "very few" Asian American bohemians in North Beach (*Real Bohemia*, 50).

[87]"City Lights Bookstore 50th Anniversary: The Birth of Cool, 1953-1960," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 June 2003, sec. D, p. 5.

[88]"Pair Seek Ban on Book Sale Charge," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 June 1957, n. p., City Lights Books Records, carton 4, fifth folder, labeled "Howl Trial--clippings and miscellaneous items," Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

politics and by marrying outside his race.[89] Wong exhibited his paintings at City Lights and was one of the "merry pranksters" that Ken Kesey led throughout California.[90] Ferlinghetti introduced Wong to Kerouac in the early 1960s, and the two instantly developed a friendship. Wong regarded Kerouac as the first white person who showed him "utter acceptance as a human person."[91] At this point Kerouac was consuming alcohol at a near suicidal pace, and he asked Wong to arrange a meeting with his father, hoping that the knowledgeable community leader could help him overcome his inner demons.[92] Wong set up a meeting but was struck by the incongruity of his father counseling someone who was "drunk all the time," wore "terrible clothes" and was "unshaven" (the elder Wong advised Kerouac to "drink all you want and write poetry").[93] Reflecting on his relationship not only to Kerouac but to the entire North Beach milieu, Wong concluded that "I lived in a world that was so far away from him, that was so distinct, even though it's around the corner from the whole scene."[94] This sense of being

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[89]Lia Chang, "Remembering Our Merry Prankster," *Asian Week*, 5-11 October 2001, http://www.asianweek.com/2001_10_05/arts_victorwong.html, p. 2, 5, accessed from the internet 14 January 2005.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Qtd. in Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (1983; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 614.

[92]Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (1978; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1979), 280.

[93]Ibid., 280-281.

[94]Ibid, 280.

"so far away" yet just "around the corner" suggested that some Asian Americans were both attracted to and alienated from North Beach, living in close proximity to the district but not feeling entirely comfortable there. The first whites to accord Wong "utter acceptance" were artists and writers, yet he felt the pull of both Chinatown and North Beach and often felt out of place in both worlds. Thus if some Asian Americans found rewarding roles within the avant-garde circles of North Beach, Wong hinted that there was a divide between himself and white bohemians that he could not entirely overcome.

Similarly, white and African American bohemians who lived in or frequented North Beach often had very different perceptions of racial intermixing in the district. Some white bohemians came to San Francisco because they believed that the city was less racially divided than other urban areas. One white man spent three years in the Latin Quarter of New Orleans and then moved to San Francisco in the mid 1950s because of its reputation for tolerating diversity.[95] As he noted, "New Orleans got to be a drag, though, because of the race thing. Everyone was all hung up with it. So I cut out for San Francisco, because everyone said things were different here."[96] Similarly, when the white minister Pierre Delattre established the Bread and Wine Mission in 1958, he noted that North Beach bohemians sought a way of life that was "more socially integrated with other races."[97] However, blacks who frequented bohemian bars and cafes in North Beach

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[95]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 5-6.

[96]Ibid., 6.

[97]June Muller, "Most Merchants Glad They're Gone," *San Francisco Examiner*, 6 August 1962, no sec., p. 18, "Cafes" envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings

recognized their status as a small minority in an overwhelmingly white area. As the African American painter Arthur Monroe affirmed, "there was *never*, *never*–I want to say this with great certainty–an integration of the community," because "there were not that many black people in North Beach. They knew they were not that welcome."[98] Thus white perceptions of tolerance differed sharply from how blacks actually experienced the racial dynamics of bohemia: if some whites believed that "things were different" racially in San Francisco, African Americans who frequented North Beach realized to the contrary that the countercultural valorization of unconventional behavior stopped far short of genuine racial integration. One explanation for the tendency of whites to exaggerate the extent of integration in North Beach was the racial geography of San Francisco itself. Because North Beach bordered Chinatown, white bohemians were relatively accustomed to intermingling with both Asian Americans and the few blacks in the district, and they often regarded this as an indication that their neighborhood was more integrated than the rest of the city. Thus whites mistook their interactions with Asian Americans and the presence of a small number of African Americans to mean that "things were different here" racially, when in fact the high visibility of blacks in an overwhelmingly white neighborhood masked, for whites, both the extent to which San Francisco was a very segregated city and the limited potential of bohemian racial intermixing to challenge segregation.

Morgue, San Francisco History Center (hereafter cited as *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC). On the Bread and Wine Mission, see chap. 2 of this dissertation.

[98]Personal interview with Monroe.

Another factor that influenced how whites perceived racial intermixing was their attraction to the supposedly primitive attributes of African Americans.[99] White bohemians often assumed that black culture contained a primitive essence which could counter the enervating forces of modernity, yet the valorization of primitivism among white bohemians went beyond race. Explaining romantic relationships among black men and white women, one North Beach poet noted the "Negro's desire to be more like the white and the Beat white's desire for the primitive," while another opined that postwar bohemians who were "fed up" with the "trappings of modern life" believed that "the Negro represents the primitive," and thus "They want to wed the primitive."[100] This white appropriation of reputedly primitive attributes of African American culture was a central feature of postwar bohemianism. In the most notorious instance, Norman Mailer contended that the typical urban black male "kept for his survival the art of the primitive," the "affirmation of the barbarian" and the "sexual outlaw," who had explored the "moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns," and who now enabled "Hip" to "erupt as a psychically armed rebellion" against the "mean

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[99]The valorization of African American primitivism on the part of whites is one of the central themes in the history of black-white intellectual relations in America. For a general discussion of white perceptions of the primitivism of jazz, see Ted Gioia, "Jazz and the Primitivist Myth," *Musical Quarterly* 73.1 (1989): 130-143, and on the post-World War II years, see Panish, *Color of Jazz*, 139.

[100]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 15 June 1958, 6, and 22 June 1958, 4.

empty hypocrisies of mass conformity."[101] As Mailer so starkly demonstrated, many white intellectuals ascribed a subversive primitivism to African Americans and then appropriated it for their own use in overcoming the conformist pressures of postwar society. However, not all white celebrations of the primitive rested on racist stereotypes. Many beat writers valorized the centuries-old bardic tradition of poetry as a quintessentially oral art form, a heritage that appeared to have all but vanished amidst the highly technical verse published by leading literary journals and then exquisitely dissected by New Critics. Explaining the significance of the first reading of "Howl," Ginsberg and Gregory Corse celebrated a return to "the original religious shamanistic prophetic priestly bardic magic!"[102] Nor was admiration for primitivism confined to literature. Delattre insisted that "I don't think of myself as a Protestant, but as a Christian in the primitive sense," including the ancient practice of community religious meals and celebrations of agape.[103] Thus if some white bohemians valorized a racial primitivism rooted in stereotypes of African American culture, others valued ancient traditions that seemed relevant for modern life and were not based on racial appropriation.

While the attraction of white bohemians to African American culture certainly perpetuated racist stereotypes, it was also rooted in the belief art forms such as jazz music

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[101]Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *Advertisements for Myself* (1959; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 341, 355, 348, 356. This essay originally appeared in *Dissent* in 1957.

[102]Qtd. in Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 17.

[103]"Far-Out Mission," *Time*, 29 June 1959, 38.

were profoundly relevant and meaningful. Kenneth Rexroth, one of the most influential literary critics on the West Coast, often denounced white hipsters whose ignorant idolatry of jazz musicians led them to believe that "the Negro is born with a sax in his mouth and a hypodermic in his arm. That's despicable. In jazz circles it's what they call Crow Jimism."[104] Yet not all North Beach bohemians resorted to racism when they expressed adoration for jazz music. Kamstra recalled that "During the 50s jazz was a vital force in the Bay Area" and served as "the music for the beats who congregated in North Beach."[105] When he heard Charles Mingus perform, "It was my first taste of anger precipitated through a musical instrument and it left its mark on me, realizing as I did that horns and basses and drums speak in a language you have to study to understand."[106] Impressed by the emotional intensity of the performance, Kamstra believed that this music required extended contemplation in order to be fully appreciated. For Kamstra, jazz musicians such as Mingus were not racial spectacles but instead extraordinarily gifted artists whose work resonated sharply.

Yet African American men drew attention from white bohemians not only as jazz musicians but also as the romantic partners of white women. Racism among white male bohemians often centered on such relationships, which were one of the most widely

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[104]Jerome Rothenberg and David Antin, "Interview with Kenneth Rexroth," April 1958, http://jacketmagazine.com/23/rex-rothbg-antin-iv.html, accessed from the internet, 18 January 2005. This interview was not published until it appeared on this website.

[105]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 5, n. p.

[106]Ibid.

discussed aspects of racial intermixing in North Beach. Whites often noted the ubiquity of interracial couples in bars and cafes. One North Beach denizen pointed out a mixed couple to a reporter and opined that "You don't see much of the interracial bit in New York. You don't see it all in New Orleans. But it's big in North Beach."[107] Similarly, Kamstra recalled how "the streets would fill up on weekends with out of town girls looking for bohemian sex," and concluded that "The blacks and the painters, especially, were particularly successful in latching onto these prizes."[108] However, not all white bohemians accepted such relationships. A sociological study of the beat generation in North Beach concluded that while most white beats tolerated interracial dating, "some definitely do not."[109] In assessing the motivation for romantic relationships between African American men and white women, one white male bohemian claimed that "white girls go after Spades because they think they're better lovers . . . more stud there," while another suggested that "The white girl was a Cadillac . . . one has arrived."[110] Such comments revealed both the anxiety of white men concerning the sexual potency of

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[107]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 15 June 1958, 6. When this series was reprinted four years later, references to a "handsome young Negro" and the "white girl who is keeping him in North Beach," and to "inter-racial love-making," were eliminated. See "The Beatniks," in William Hogan and William German, eds., *The San Francisco Chronicle Reader* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 40, 46, and Brown, 15 June 1958, 4 and 22 June 1958, 4. For a discussion of how mass-media depictions of the beat generation portrayed race relations among bohemians, see chap. 1 of this dissertation.

[108]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 9, p. 88-89.

[109]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 51.

[110]Ibid., 51-52. Ellipses in original.

African American males as well as the assumption that black men regarded white women as status symbols. Moreover, regardless of the particular stereotype or prejudice that white men deployed to explain interracial dating, most commentators assumed that both black men and white women were motivated not by genuine love or affection but rather by distinctly racial ulterior motives.

In contrast to such perceptions, white women often explained their attraction to black men not in terms of racial difference but rather of romantic love and psychological bonds. Of course, some white women delighted in the extent to which interracial dating made them spectacles. Assessing her relationship with a black man, one white woman exclaimed "Wow, are we a shocker!"[111] This woman obviously reveled in the fact that relationships with African American men were controversial. Yet other white women expressed very different viewpoints. When asked why she had sex with a black man, one young woman responded that "It wasn't race . . . it wasn't sex . . . he [the Negro] was kind and gentle . . . something I wanted."[112] For Eileen Kaufman, a white woman who married the black poet Bob Kaufman, the source of her attraction was both his literary talent and his ability to challenge her basic values and assumptions. Eileen first discovered North Beach in 1958, when a co-worker brought her to the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, where everyone "seemed to be bright and really living."[113] At this point she

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[111]Ibid.

[112]Ibid. Ellipses and brackets in original.

[113]Barbara Gravelle, "Six North Beach Women," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 21 October 1979, 38.

continued to work at a department store in Sacramento but came to San Francisco every Friday, "weekending in a Bohemian kind of thing."[114] One night she had coffee with Bob and immediately appreciated his poetic talents, recalling that "When Bob read 'African Dream' to me, I knew I had met a genius."[115] Yet Eileen also emphasized that with this first encounter, "my values changed overnight. I had been a greedy, mercenary career girl whose only object was to get it while you can. But the very night I met Bob, I could see these values totally changing."[116] He convinced her that working solely for money meant "throwing away *the only time* in this *lifetime* that you have," and she immediately began "accepting a rejection" of the "nine to five trip" and its "negative energy."[117] Yet the experience involved more than her infatuation with his poetry and ideas about life, as Eileen recalled a strong mutual attraction: "There were so many things we had to find out about each other all at once."[118] Finally, the relationship that the two developed involved her participation in "the newly formed North Beach Community," where "I felt at

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[114]Ibid.

[115]Eileen Kaufman, "From *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers?*" In Brenda Knight, ed. *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1996), 114.

[116]Ibid.

[117]Tony Seymour, "Don't Forget Bob Kaufman," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 25 April 1976, no sec., n. p., "Kaufman, Bob--SF Poet" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[118]Eileen Kaufman, "From *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers?*" 109.

home."[119] The attraction that Eileen felt for Bob derived not from racial perceptions but rather from her immediate intellectual and psychological connection to North Beach in general and Bob in particular. Thus racial exoticism was by no means the only factor motivating interracial relationships.

Like San Francisco, postwar Los Angeles contained a very diverse and segregated population. Beginning with the Depression and continuing through the 1950s, many African Americans migrated to L.A. and usually settled in the south-central part of the city, although sizeable black populations developed in a few outlying cities, including Santa Monica, located immediately north of Venice.[120] Venice itself contained small populations of both Mexican Americans and African Americans, but the area was predominantly white and included a substantial proportion of retired Jewish Americans.[121] Although Venice was racially mixed, it was also segregated, as African Americans were clustered in the Oakwood neighborhood, an area that whites often referred to as "Ghost Town."[122]

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[119]Seymour, "Don't Forget Bob Kaufman," n. p.; Gravelle, "Six North Beach Women," 38.

[120]Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 45-46, 97, 110.

[121]Raymond A. Rocco, "Latino Los Angeles: Reframing Boundaries/Borders," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 367; Amy Hill Shevitz, "Jewish Space and Place in Venice," in Ava F. Kahn and Marc Dollinger, eds., *California Jews* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 69.

[122]Personal interview with Carol Fondiller, Venice, California, 20 April 2002.

Racial intermixing was a central component of bohemianism in Venice, both as an imagined ideal of whites and an actual feature of social life. The writer Lionel Rolfe recalled that African Americans often read poetry at the Gas House, and Perkoff once observed that he and a friend were the only white customers in the Pizza House, an eatery located near the Venice West Café and one of his cherished haunts.[123] The fact that racial intermixing occurred in the bohemian public spaces of Venice led some white intellectuals to conflate the presence of a few African Americans in their favorite hangouts with complete racial harmony in the local counterculture. With characteristic hyperbole, Lipton noted the presence of "cool cats" at the Venice High School and claimed that "integration was no problem here–white, Negro, Mexican."[124] He even told a reporter that "The Negro is accepted on the beat scene as equal in every respect."[125] Despite such exaggeration, the legitimization of racial intermixing among Venice bohemians was not entirely a figment of the white imagination. Assessing the avant-garde colony of Venice, one African American painter observed that "I like these people very much. I'm one of them," and a black actor noted that he resided to the district because it lacked racial prejudice.[126] Similarly, a Latino artist moved to Venice from St.

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[123]Personal interview with Rolfe; Perkoff, journal no. 30, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[124]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 137.

[125]Don Neff, "Beatniks' Search Leads to a Life of Squalor," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 1962, sec. 2, p. 10.

[126]Jack Smith, "Flame Flickering Out for Beatniks," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1965, sec. 2, p. 3; Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads,' Tourist Novelty Gone," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 April 1962, sec. G, p. 5.

Louis because he believed it would be an ideal location to paint seascapes and live among avant-garde intellectuals.[127] While whites such as Lipton repeatedly overstated the extent to which bohemians in Venice were racially integrated, there were blacks and Latinos who found the district appealing as both an artistic colony and an area with less racial animosity than other parts of Los Angeles.

White bohemians often understood their interracial friendships in terms of both genuine camaraderie and racial exoticism. In the early 1960s, Perkoff befriended an African American nicknamed Tambu, a veteran of the Marine Corps.[128] On one occasion, shortly after Tambu's mother died, he played drums, sang and danced on the beach while Perkoff sat nearby, awestruck at the "black beautiful hands pounding" in order to "work off his grief."[129] Perkoff was amazed by "this huge cat, a mountain of lite [sic], a fountain of being alive," and noted that "I doubt Africa in her deepest belly wisdom could spit the truth cleaner and more like a dance than this son of her vast and varied face."[130] Reflecting on the experience, Perkoff concluded

> With no more reason than his own knowing that there is love, that he himself feels, that certain things shake the tree of his being to the deep white blind pulsing core of its growth from the soil towards the sun, he stands tall towards the unreal gold haven in the sky, stabbing towards it, sucking up water and soul from the

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[127]Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads,'" sec. G, p. 5.

[128]Perkoff cited the man's name as Curtis J. Smith. Perkoff, journal no. 44, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[129]Ibid.

[130]Ibid.

earth and spitting it thru [sic] his up thrust branches.[131]

Obviously, witnessing such an outpouring of emotion was a moving experience. Yet the language that Perkoff used implied that Tambu functioned, at least partially, as an exotic racial figure for the white poet. Tambu was the son not merely of a single woman but moreover of the "vast and varied face" of Africa itself, and invocations of "belly wisdom" and "no more reason than knowing," along with descriptions of "stabbing," "sucking" and "spitting" suggested that Perkoff regarded Tambu as the personification of a raw and undiluted primitive energy that was spontaneous and intuitive, precisely the type of energy that many white bohemians regarded as an essential alternative to the middle-class culture that they scorned. Thus the primitive characteristics that whites celebrated in African Americans confirmed their own rejection of postwar society. While Perkoff genuinely exhibited both empathy for his grieving friend and admiration for a moment of uninhibited self-expression, he did so within a racial conceptual framework in which Tambu embodied African American culture as many white intellectuals understood it.

However, white bohemians in Venice, like their counterparts in North Beach, valued primitivism in ways that went beyond race. Like many beat writers, Lipton emphasized the bardic role of poets as people who speak to and for a broader public, insisting that "Poetry was always a vocal art" and calling for "a restoration of poetry to its ancient, traditional role as a socially functional art" that resonated outside of academic

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[131]Ibid.

coteries.[132] Moreover, Lipton titled his expose of Venice beats *The Holy Barbarians*, reflecting his belief that bohemians sought to "cut back to something like primitive root sources for the meaning and function of true myth and ritual, before it was taken over by rulers and clerics" and "wrung dry of every esthetic pleasure."[133] Similarly, one white bohemian believed that "In a primitive culture everyone knows his place," but now "Culture is torn up, there are no patterns and no one is satisfied," while a writer invoked a contradictory juxtaposition in labeling himself a "primitive sophisticate" or a "sophisticated primitive."[134] Such sentiments demonstrated that many postwar bohemians looked to the past for "root sources" and "patterns" yet simultaneously identified as members of a sophisticated avant-garde intelligentsia. Thus the valorization of primitivism among white bohemians was rooted not only in racial perceptions but also in basic assumptions about poetry and the spiritual decay of postwar society.

Furthermore, white bohemians in Venice often expressed an affinity for jazz music in ways that both perpetuated and eschewed racist stereotypes, and here too primitivism was central to their thinking. When Lipton assessed the relationship between jazz and European culture, he emphasized its ties not to modernist art and literature but rather to ancient Greek mythology, asserting that "All music is sacred and ritual in origin,

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[132]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 222.

[133]Ibid., 161.

[134]Frank Laro, "Beat Generation Asks Dedication to Principles," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 19 June 1958, part 1, page 11; Laro, "Beat Generation: New Look," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 1 June 1959, part 1, p. 1.

but in European music these origins have long been 'refined' out of it. In jazz they are still close to the surface," to the "orgiastic (in the Greek sense of orgia, secret rites practiced only by the initiated, as in the rites of Bacchus or the worship of Demeter at Eleusis)."[135] With typical arrogance, Lipton portrayed listening to jazz as an elitist rite that only the "initiated" could fully appreciate, yet the more salient point was that jazz resonated not as a component of the cultural heritage of Africa but rather as an artistic and spiritual force that could restore an overrefined European musical tradition to the sacral relevance it held in ancient Greece. On another occasion Lipton mused on jazz as an African American art form, observing "Negro jazz in America: Joyless and uprooted, shorn of all sacramentalism; it was through this corrupt and tragic and half-crazed immitation [sic] of the sacred dance that America sought to feed its hunger for the mana that had gone out of life."[136] Here, African American creativity was "corrupt" and "half-crazed" but also "sacred" in expressing the elemental forces of life. With less ambiguity, Perkoff once described the performance of the white saxophonist Paul Freidin as "great fat sound–nigger sound, jazz soul."[137] In utilizing a racist epithet to characterize the "soul" of jazz as distinctly African American, Perkoff aptly demonstrated the staggering insensitivity of white intellectuals toward both the racism that blacks

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[135]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 210.

[136]Lipton manuscripts, box 4 folder 13, Lawrence Lipton Collection, Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections, Information Services Division, University of Southern California.

[137]Perkoff, journal no. 5, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

confronted and the extent to which whites reinforced such prejudice in the very language they used to celebrate jazz creativity. Furthermore, this use of racist language to describe a white musician revealed the multiple layers of racial perception that imbued the attraction of white intellectuals to jazz music: they simultaneously identified jazz as distinctly African American yet celebrated whites who embodied its black "soul."

White women in Venice often explained their romantic involvement with black men in terms not only of race but also of shared interests in music, politics and ways of life. Of course, racial exoticism motivated some white women to pursue interracial relationships. One such woman had a Native American boyfriend in junior high school, but when she met him years later and tried to pursue a relationship, he was uncomfortable dating her: "He had become conscious of the difference in our social status–not only money, I mean the racial thing. It made me want him all the more but it bugged him."[138] This demonstrated not only that racial difference encouraged some white women to pursue relationships with nonwhite men but also that such men often recognized that they functioned as exotic spectacles in such relationships. Yet another white woman who dated African American men expressed very different motivations. Assessing her attraction to black jazz musicians, she noted that "The only chance for a woman to establish a genuinely good relationship with these guys" was to "share their enthusiasm for the music. Just on her sex she can't do it. You can't make it that way."[139] For her,

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[138]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 100.

[139]Ibid., 20.

building satisfying romantic relationships with African American musicians required not merely sexual attraction but moreover a shared affinity for jazz. Moreover, after moving to Venice, she dated an African American man who appealed to her in part because he was "nonconformist in his own way:" "I was riding with him on his motorcycle and wearing boots and Levi's and entering into a life I had known nothing about and which held some kind of fascination for me."[140] The exoticism in this instance was based not on race but rather on the allure of ways of life that seemed adversarial and defiant. When she first met her future husband, an African American Communist, her initial attraction was not racial but political. She recalled that "We got into a political argument the first day we met because I was at the time what you'd call a Left Wing deviationist," while "He was still a rigid party liner" and thus "kept looking for a label he could pin on me. He called me a Menshevik and a Trotskyite and all those things."[141] As a red diaper baby who once belonged to the Young Communist League, she was initially attracted to this man because of their shared interest in radical politics. Overall, this woman expressed a broad range of motivations for dating African American men, and if racial difference played a role in such relationships, it was not the only factor nor the most significant.

Racial intermixing was also a central component in the development of the coffeehouse scene near Los Angeles City College. Most black Angelenos who attended junior college in the postwar decades went to LACC, which also included a substantial

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[140]Ibid., 67.

[141]Ibid.

number of whites students.[142] Located northwest of downtown, the neighborhood surrounding LACC was just a few miles from small avant-garde colonies in the Silver Lake and Echo Park districts, as well as the nightclubs of Hollywood, and thus a wide array of students, faculty, musicians and politicos gravitated to coffeehouses in the vicinity. Moreover, the fact that this area was located next to the largest African American college in the city meant that a greater number of blacks frequented coffeehouses in the district than in Venice or North Beach. One such venue was Pogo's Swamp, managed by Levi Kingston, an African American who grew up in South Central L.A. Kingston recalled that "salt and pepper, white and black" was a "big deal, *socially*" at Pogo's.[143] Asked if he and his customers thought racial intermixing at the coffeehouse was significant, Kingston responded "definitely:" "you were aware that things were changing" and "would seek out the intellectuals, the artists" and "the [civil rights] movement people" who frequented Pogo's.[144] In the early 1960s, Pogo's denizens ranged from future LSD guru Owsley Stanley to Ron Everett, who later changed his name to Maulana Karenga and worked in the Black Arts movement.[145] Ruminating on the

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[142]Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 114; personal interview with Lionel Rolfe.

[143]Personal interview with Levi Kingston, Los Angeles, California, 14 June 2002. Emphasis is Kingston's.

[144]Ibid.

[145]On Stanley, see Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 309-314; on Karenga's involvement with Black Arts leaders, see Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 311-324.

diversity of the scene, Kingston enthused "From Owsley to Karenga, you know, I mean that's pretty *wild*."[146] On one occasion, African American blues musicians Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, who performed at nightclubs like the Ash Grove and the Troubador, came into Pogo's for an impromptu jam session, leading to an "*amazing* night."[147] Thus the diversity of Pogo's was simultaneously artistic, political and racial, as individuals with a broad range of interests congregated in the same venue to discuss contemporary social and cultural issues and intermingle with a very eclectic clientele.

Another coffeehouse near LACC was the Xanadu, which like Pogo's attracted a diverse crowd. The white writer Lionel Rolfe attended LACC in the early 1960s and frequented area coffeehouses, recalling that "The primary fact about the Xanadu was that it was a central city coffee house [sic], the City College coffee house. The great civil rights struggle was just beginning both at home and in the deep South; thus the Xanadu was where it was at in terms of white and black getting together."[148] Rolfe observed that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "one of the obvious features of L.A.'s burgeoning coffeehouse scene was the mixing of black and white, often through the medium of music."[149] Because the Xanadu was open all night, it attracted musicians who wanted a

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[146]Personal interview with Kingston. Emphasis is Kingston's.

[147]Ibid. Emphasis is Kingston's.

[148]Rolfe, "The Great Coffee Houses of Los Angeles: Where the Beat Went On," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 21 October 1979, *California Living* sec., p. 25.

[149]Rolfe, *In Search of . . . Literary L.A.* (Los Angeles: California Classics Books, 1991), 163.

place to hang out after their nightclub gigs, including McGhee, Terry and Lightening Hopkins, and their tendency to give impromptu performances attracted both white and black blues fans.[150] Walden Muns, a friend of Rolfe, once opined that McGhee "was just one of the old black guys" who "always came in and played in the corner of the Xanadu. Except that he happened to be the world's foremost blues guitar player."[151] Moreover, Rolfe noted that "Black and white talent mixed not only in music but in the literary arts," as writers from Silver Lake and Echo Park intermingled with students and faculty from LACC.[152] Rolfe insisted that "the fermentation of the black and white that was occurring then in Los Angeles–especially in the Xanadu–was significant," as the coffeehouse provided an environment in which a wide variety of people interested in politics, music and literature interacted with like-minded individuals.[153]

Men, Women, and Bohemia

In the twenty years following World War II, gender relations in America underwent several contradictory transformations. Wartime industrial production necessitated the employment of women on a larger scale than ever before, but in the immediate postwar period most manufacturers insisted that women give up their jobs for

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[150]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 25.

[151]Rolfe, *Literary L.A.*, 17.

[152]Ibid., 18.

[153]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 25.

demobilized male soldiers, while magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Life* portrayed the end of the war as the return of male breadwinning and female housekeeping.[154] The Cold War years led to similar incongruities. On the one hand, the suburban home was portrayed as a zone of containment for white middle-class Americans, a sphere in which women functioned as wives, mothers and household managers and beyond which, at least ideally, they ventured only to buy kitchen gadgets.[155] On the other hand, women entered the labor force in large numbers throughout the 1950s, including married middle-class women, although they were largely limited to traditionally feminine occupations as clerical workers, nurses and service sector employees.[156] Furthermore, the "feminine mystique" that Betty Friedan found at the core of postwar popular culture was countered by positive portrayals in mass-circulation magazines of women who attained roles outside the home as wage earners, community leaders and even politicians.[157] Thus millions of American women struggled to balance their

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[154]On the surge of women's employment during World War II, see William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 121. On mass-media depictions of a return to conventional gender roles in the postwar years, see Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 69.

[155]Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; reprint, New York: Dell, 1983), particularly chaps. 1-3 and 9; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), particularly chaps. 4, 5 and 7.

[156]Chafe, *Paradox of Change*, 163-164, 188-189.

[157]Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994),

responsibilities as both employees and household managers while the mass media sent mixed messages concerning their ideal roles. The situation for men was similarly inconsistent. The mass media often portrayed men as breadwinners who were responsible for the economic well being of their families, yet many husbands and fathers found such duties unrewarding, and magazines such as *Playboy* celebrated a sexually aggressive heterosexual manhood that was utterly unconcerned with marriage and family.[158] Meanwhile, social critics lamented the rise of "organization men" whose self-esteem revolved around conforming to the highly bureaucratized structures in which they sought advancement, and some feared that the dual banalities of popular culture and suburbia had created a crisis of masculinity.[159] Thus men and women in postwar America seemed paradoxically to confront increasing pressures to conform to narrow gender roles yet have greater opportunities to disregard or at least substantially reformulate such roles.

Gender relations among bohemians were similarly variegated. Many avant-garde intellectuals rejected conventional notions of masculinity while reaffirming traditional attitudes toward femininity. Bohemian men and women often understood art and

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231, 242, 251.

[158]Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1983), particularly chaps. 3-5; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), chap. 7.

[159]Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (1985; reprint, Hanover, HH: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), chap. 4; Arthur Schlessinger, Jr., "The Crisis of Masculinity," *Esquire*, November 1958.

literature as essentially male realms, and thus husbands and fathers who devoted their lives to creativity rather than breadwinning were not seen as abdicating responsibility– precisely the opposite, they were following their true calling as artists. Furthermore, many bohemian women were employed outside the home, but such work often constituted an extension of their roles within the domestic sphere, as feminine responsibilities now included not only managing households but also supporting them economically. In some cases men avoided full time employment by manipulating women who were willing to support them financially. Yet relationships between bohemian men and women were not always based on female subordination. Some women enjoyed the opportunity to work outside the home while their male partners not only pursued artistic or literary creativity but also served as housekeepers and child rearers. Moreover, many bohemian women rejected domesticity altogether. Women who came to North Beach and Venice after ending unsatisfying marriages were not about to recreate stifling relationships in a more exotic locale. Indeed, many bohemian women asserted both their individual autonomy and their intellectual equality with men, participating fully in the social and creative life of urban countercultures.

Bohemian women, whether married or living with a male companion, often worked outside the home and sometimes were the sole breadwinners of their households. Of eighteen women interviewed for a sociological study of the beat generation in San Francisco, ten worked to help provide for their husbands and/or children.[160] While not all

[160]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 86, 92-94, 116.

of these women were the only breadwinners for their families, the fact that such a high proportion of women in the study worked to help support others suggested that men were not typically the sole economic providers for bohemian households. One reason for this was that male intellectuals often expected women to support them. A musician lamented that he had "No chick to do the dishes for me and take care of me," indicating that some men assumed a "chick" was obligated to fill conventional roles of housewifery.[161] In contrast, another man noted that "my wife and I now have a partnership; she supplies the money by working as a teacher, if I will write."[162] This invocation of "partnership" to describe the reversal of conventional gender roles suggested that some couples regarded female breadwinning as a perfectly acceptable and mutually beneficial arrangement. In some cases, men combined domestic responsibilities with their creative work. At one point in her marriage, Shirley Berman worked outside the home while her husband Wallace cared for their son and devoted his creative energy to the little magazine *Semina*.[163] Regardless of how couples parceled out domestic duties, the employment of women outside the home was prevalent among North Beach bohemians.

Some women simultaneously reveled in the intellectual atmosphere of North Beach and found fulfillment within the domestic sphere. Joanna McClure recalled that

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[161]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 5.

[162]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 19.

[163]George B. Leonard, Jr., "The Bored, the Bearded, and the Beat," *Look*, 19 August 1958, 67; *Lost and Found in California: Four Decades of Assemblage Art* (Santa Monica: Corcoran, Wayne and Pence Galleries, 1988), 97-99.

while her husband Michael was "in touch with all aspects of poetry," "I was busy living in the city thinking about what it meant to live with Michael and be pregnant, which was to me far more important. How to make a living, where to live, what to do about children, the man you live with and your life. Those were my concerns."[164] Yet Joanna did not feel stifled or confined to the home: for her, living in North Beach and attending artistic and literary events was a liberating way of life. She moved to San Francisco from Tucson after the dissolution of her first marriage, and she married Michael after first enjoying life as a single young woman. Working at a bookstore, she felt "enchanted to be living by myself for the first time. I wore Guatemalan skirts and rope-soled shoes. My landlady tried to talk me into dressing well. She kept saying, 'Don't you want men to look at you?' I said, 'Oh no, no. I've had enough men in my life for a while.'"[165] When she began dating Michael, she quickly felt comfortable amidst the artists and writers with whom he associated. Joanna was "interested in expanding my views, in seeing more of the world than I had known," and at one of the first poetry readings that Michael took her to, she "looked around at the women there and thought, I like the way these women look. I like their faces. I am right where I belong."[166] Thus as both a single woman and a married mother, Joanna McClure found the bohemian milieu to be liberating. Although she highly valued artistic and literary events, she immersed herself in roles as wife and

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[164]Gravelle, "Six North Beach Women," 33.

[165]Ibid., 32.

[166]Ibid., 33.

mother because such concerns seemed "far more important" to her than writing poetry.

However, the subordination of women was a pervasive feature of bohemianism in North Beach, often because men assumed that artistic and literary creativity were quintessentially male endeavors. This assumption pervaded the thinking of many beat writers. John Clellon Holmes once told Ginsberg that "The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang," and while such groupings might include both gay and straight men, they were almost exclusively male.[167] This often meant that women who wanted to test their intellectual mettle among men had to justify their mere presence at male-dominated artistic and literary discussions. Reflecting on her relationship with Lew Welch, poet Lenore Kandel noted that

> In the beginning he had a vision that all the women folks would go off here and discuss all these feminine magicals, and all the men folks sit over here. And there were times when he'd get disturbed that I was talking with his poet friends instead of over with the women folk. He said, "Why don't you want to be off talking about makeup and stuff rather than be in here talking about poetry?" I told him that poetry was what was interesting me. Later he said, "You're as good a poet as I am," and he copped to it. But it's a hard one and can be definitely one of the stumbling blocks in a relationship.[168]

This refusal to remain "with the women" suggested that many female bohemians conformed to the expectations that she challenged. Moreover, the fact that Welch eventually "copped" to acknowledging that Kandel was "as good a poet" demonstrated that male recognition of female intellectual capacity sometimes occurred only after

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[167]Gordon Ball, ed., *Allen Ginsberg: Journals Mid-Fifties, 1954-1958* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 21.

[168]Gravelle, "Six North Beach Women," 36.

women asserted roles for themselves within artistic and literary circles that many bohemians regarded as male territory.

Yet gender roles had as much to do with the interpersonal dynamics of particular relationships as with the assumption that art and literature were male enterprises. Of course, some women gravitated to men whose creative talent and forceful personalities seemed irresistible. When Eileen Kaufman met Bob Kaufman, she quickly concluded that "this man could create my life or destroy it," yet she "reached out" to "the man and his poetry."[169] In some cases, women drawn to creative men subordinated themselves completely. One young woman had a relationship with a "really dreamy guy, who bought me books, and dedicated poems to me. I was desperately in love with him, and was his slave."[170] However, this was by no means a universal pattern. As African American painter Arthur Monroe noted, "The fact that women did the washing and the cleaning had more to do with what was happening between them and the individual that they were involved with, and their respective needs."[171] Moreover, Monroe emphasized that "There were some of the most brilliant women that you ever wanted to meet in North Beach," and many artists and writers believed that "you can't discriminate against a good idea," regardless of the gender of its exponent.[172] As Joanna McClure succinctly observed, "The

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[169]Eileen Kaufman, "From *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers?*" 114.

[170]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 84.

[171]Personal interview with Arthur Monroe.

[172]Ibid.

men did talk and act like chauvinists, but we were strong independent women."[173] Thus a broad array of attitudes and predispositions influenced intellectual and romantic relationships among bohemian men and women. If some men were hesitant to accept women as intellectual equals, others had no problem recognizing that the best thinking and creating was often done by women. Moreover, as Joanna McClure revealed, the fact that male chauvinism existed did not mean that women could not assert themselves.

Women in the Venice counterculture also confronted an array of challenges and opportunities, and many played subordinate roles in their romantic relationships with male intellectuals. Lipton noted that while a few men worked full time to provide for their families and limited their creative work to evenings and weekends, most sought "a marriage or shack-up partner who is willing to work for a living" and function as "the chief provider."[174] If both the man and woman pursued artistic or literary creativity, "it is the wife who is the Sunday painter or writer."[175] In such cases, the employment of women outside the home constituted an extension of female housewifery beyond the domestic sphere, as women were now responsible for all aspects of household management, including its economic survival. One such woman moved to Venice from North Beach after her husband died in the Korean War and embarked on a series of

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[173]"Women of the Beat Generation Panel," San Francisco Book Festival, 2 November 1996, transcribed in Ann Charters, ed., *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 630.

[174]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 54.

[175]Ibid.

relationships in which she served as nurturer and helpmate. In Venice she became involved with a poet and painter, and even his physical abuse did not deter her devotion: "When things aren't going so well with his painting, or he gets a poem back from a magazine, he broods about it for days. Then all of a sudden he blows up, about everything, against everybody. And I happen to be around."[176] When his career became more successful, she realized that "He doesn't need me anymore," and she moved in with a writer whom she quickly decided was "going to be the greatest living poet in America."[177] Abandoning this man because of his sexual impotence, she began dating a novelist and helped him kick his heroin habit, insisting that "A man can do anything if he's got the right woman to help him," and that her latest beau would become "the greatest novelist in America–maybe in the world."[178] Calling this woman the "handmaiden of the muse," Lipton concluded that "Whoever the god of her temple was at the moment was always the greatest, and she was proud to be in his service."[179] Thus some women sought romantic partners whose artistic and literary talent they could nourish and support as housewives and economic providers. Yet this "handmaiden of the muse" did not express dissatisfaction or a sense of being confined to the domestic sphere, and her willingness to serve as a nurturer stopped short of tolerating a sexless

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[176]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 96-98.

[177]Ibid., 98.

[178]Ibid., 99.

[179]Ibid., 95, 98.

relationship. Thus bohemian women who established romantic and marital relationships in which they functioned largely as wives, mothers, and housekeepers did not necessarily view themselves as subordinate or trapped.

Not all women dedicated themselves to providing emotional and financial support for men, but they did have to find a place for themselves in a bohemian colony in which artistic and literary creativity was widely regarded as a male pursuit. Stuart Perkoff, one of most admired poets in Venice, idolized "the Muse" or "the Lady," a life-force that guided not only his creativity but his entire life. The Muse was "powerful and dangerous," "infinite and unpredictable," and Perkoff believed that his "path" was "chosen by the Muse for her own reasons."[180] Furthermore, he once acknowledged that "The woman writer" was "a continuing mystery to me," in part because "it's beyond my comprehension how a female relates" to the Muse.[181] Thus artistic and literary creation was understood through a gendered binary in which men valorized feminine creative energy in the abstract but had difficulty comprehending how women, whose subordination they usually took for granted, could actually be writers themselves. Yet this did not mean that men like Perkoff dismissed all women as irrelevant intellectually. One of the few people whose critical input he valued was a female friend whom he regarded as "very perceptive about verse" and a "fine poet" in her own right.[182] Yet this

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[180]Perkoff, journal nos. 9, 8, and 5, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[181]Perkoff, journal no. 8, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[182]Perkoff, journal nos. 8 and 44, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

woman remained an anomaly, a rare female presence in a small artistic colony that was intellectually dominated by men. However much male writers and artists might value a few female intellectuals as equals, many women remained in the background. Carol Fondiller, who moved to Venice in 1959, recalled that intellectual life in the district was "a man's world," "very, very machismo," and that "the women were usually backup, they were the ones that enabled the guys to write their poetry."[183] Fondiller observed that many bohemian women in Venice "saw themselves as the muse, and a lot of them saw themselves as being overworked and underpaid and underappreciated."[184] The fact that men largely monopolized intellectual life in Venice certainly did not prevent women from pursuing painting or writing, but it did force many women to play subordinate roles.

When women refused to provide economic support for the creative work of their husbands, the result could be the collapse of their marriages. This was the case of Stuart and Suzan Perkoff, who married in 1949. In contrast to her mother, who was a successful career woman, Suzan insisted on staying at home to raise her children.[185] However, by the mid 1950s Stuart found it increasingly difficult to balance a full time job with his growing desire to be a poet, and this created extraordinary tension between them. She once expressed her frustration at continually struggling to survive financially, an outburst that Stuart characteristically recorded as a poem: "I'm tired of poverty! I'm tired / of not

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[183]Personal interview with Carol Fondiller.

[184]Ibid.

[185]Maynard, *Venice West*, 70.

having enough to eat / and nothing to wear / for me or the kids / and always dirt & [sic] hunger / I'm tired."[186] Once, after a series of late-night revelries in which they and their friends used marijuana and Benzedrine and experienced introspective hallucinations, Suzan had a mental breakdown and checked into a hospital for psychological counseling. Afterwards, she and Stuart both embarked on a series of extramarital affairs.[187] When they separated in 1959, Stuart was simultaneously devastated at the collapse of their relationship and furious that she seemed to regard him merely as a source of financial support.[188] He found it incomprehensible that "my willing acceptance of the responsibility of taking care of her and the kids" was "all that's keeping us apart," that "she misses me, needs me, but insists on that. Crazy."[189] Stuart was willing to make yet another effort to hold down a steady job, but he insisted that "I have to know she wants *me* to support her, not just to be supported," and that "If she doesn't need me for more than bread, there's nothing happening."[190] Ultimately, they both realized that their priorities were simply not compatible: "Suzan intuits that the way I am living is the realest [sic] expression of my own self and needs, and that the family responsibilities

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[186]Perkoff, unnumbered journal, box 5, Perkoff folder labeled "18 items 230 pages," Lawrence Lipton Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles.

[187]Maynard, *Venice West*, 73-76.

[188]Perkoff, journal nos. 4 and 23, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[189]Perkoff, journal no. 20, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[190]Perkoff, journal no. 23, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

would be in conflict, and says she doesn't want to share that life."[191] Stuart regarded their breakup in terms of his preordained destiny as willed by the Muse, concluding that events "which were incomprehensible are now seen to be part of a highly integrated pattern" that "was chosen by the Muse."[192] Although separating from Suzan devastated him, he interpreted it as a necessary stage in his development as a poet. The means in which he rationalized the failure of his marriage suggested the subordinate position that Suzan came to occupy in his life: although Stuart dearly loved his wife and children, writing poetry mattered far more to him than providing for their well being, and thus he increasingly regarded Suzan as a nag whose only concern was money. However, Suzan was not a "handmaiden of the muse:" unlike some bohemian women, she refused to assume responsibility for the economic support of her husband and children. She renounced the role of female breadwinner that so many male writers and artists, whether consciously or unconsciously, expected from their wives and girlfriends. Yet this also meant rejecting the only basis on which her marriage could have survived.

The dissolution of their marriage occurred simultaneously with two other important changes in Stuart's life, his commitment to writing poetry as his sole vocation and his growing use of heroin. What little money he scraped together was often used to buy drugs, and much of his mental energy was consumed in the highs and lows of

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[191]Perkoff, journal no. 5, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[192]Ibid.

addiction.[193] Moreover, his separation from Suzan represented the end of his attempt to maintain a conventional nine-to-five job and his total dedication to being a poet. Throughout the 1950s, he believed that "there must be some way of my fitting into" a breadwinner role.[194] It was not merely the fact that working full time interfered with writing but more importantly that he had to suppress his personality among co-workers, who regarded his bohemian attitudes and way of life as illegitimate at best and subversive at worst. He could temporarily repress his desire to be a poet and force himself to interact with colleagues who did not share his view that capitalist society was a hideous "shuck" of commercialized hypocrisy, or he could utterly reject conventional employment and devote himself to writing poetry with like-minded individuals. He spent a decade trying to find a middle ground between the two extremes, but he was temperamentally incapable of doing so. As a result, he regarded the end of his marriage as fate and never again worked seriously at any vocation besides poetry.

Henceforth, Stuart pursued relationships only with women who accepted the fact that he would provide no financial support for either himself or a romantic partner. Less than a year after breaking up with Suzan, he learned that his current girlfriend was pregnant and felt "terrified of hemming in myself with more responsibility," insisting that "I am not going to be anybody's husband and provider."[195] They separated and he

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[193]Perkoff, journal nos. 1, 4, 5, 31, 37, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[194]Perkoff, journal no. 39, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[195]Perkoff, journal nos. 31 and 25, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

embarked on a series of relationships with women for whom he often felt a powerful sexual, romantic and sometimes emotional attraction but rarely any hint of financial obligation or responsibility. In some cases, women accepted this, and at one point he married a woman fourteen years younger than he, a person who "seems not only willing to take such good care of me, but eager–and doesn't feel there's any imbalance–that it is not only all right, but that it is her thing to do–while I do my own thing" as a poet.[196] Yet other women saw Perkoff as a leech who might feel genuine love but seemed utterly incapable of showing real respect for women. A girlfriend once told him "if you only had honor you'd be a beautiful cat," a phrase that haunted him for years to come (as his repetition of it in his journals attested).[197] He could love, admire and respect women, but he could also tell them that "Your needs are not a factor in my decisions, baby!"[198] Perkoff recognized that he caused other people pain, and once noted that a girlfriend was "wigging" over "what she calls the 'responsibility' of me, my needs and hunger, which are, it is true, so enormous."[199] He also realized that many former girlfriends were better off without him, once admitting that a woman who would have nothing more to do with him had made a "wise decision."[200] Yet to a significant extent, the most important

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[196]Quotation from Perkoff, journal no. 42, and this marriage is discussed in journal no. 29 and an unnumbered journal in box 4, folder 2, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[197]Perkoff, journal nos. 14 and 35, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[198]Perkoff, journal no. 13, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[199]Perkoff, journal no. 30, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[200]Perkoff, journal no. 28, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

woman in his life was a feminized Muse, "the Lady," an idealized figure that rendered most flesh and blood counterparts subordinate at best and superfluous at worst. Perkoff was an extreme example of a type of bohemian masculinity in which women were always subordinate sexually, economically and often intellectually. Of course, not all male bohemians fit this type or embodied it to the extreme that Perkoff did. Nonetheless, the tendency of some men to regard women as inferior was a central component of gender relations among Venice bohemians. Many women in Venice had to confront the fact that the counterculture in which they interacted was, to a large extent, shaped by sexist men.

However, such male influence was by no means universal or omnipotent, as bohemian women often asserted their autonomy and participated in the Venice counterculture as equals. This was especially true of women who abandoned unsatisfying marriages before migrating to the district. One young woman acknowledged that her first marriage was merely "a device to *free* myself from parental authority!"[201] Shortly after marrying she realized that "I was only nineteen years old and it was now or never, and that I was going to try and find myself some happiness. That's how I came to feel. So I just took off and left. I left two automobiles and a house full of furniture and everything else. I packed a bag and got a bus to California."[202] Another Venice woman married because of parental pressure and had a nice home and ample material possessions but felt that she had to make a change: "I just picked up one morning and ran. I didn't know

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[201]Lipton, *Holy Barbarians*, 63.

[202]Ibid., 65.

where I was going. All I knew was I wanted out. I didn't take a thing with me. The only place I could think to fly to was Mexico. There I got a divorce. And an abortion."[203] Other women migrated to the district after leaving children as well as husbands. One woman married and had a child, but her husband was frequently unemployed and they decided to let his parents adopt their child: "The day I left my baby I decided that if I couldn't have my child I certainly didn't want this man. We separated."[204] After a second failed marriage and a second child given up to in-laws, she realized that "It was no longer possible for me to love any man with conventional ideas or live a conventional way of life."[205] She moved to Venice and married a writer, yet three months later she headed east on Route 66 with another man, longing to be "out on the open road and *going* somewhere. Preferably *with* someone, *away*. It doesn't matter much where *to* as long as it's *away*."[206] Although a beat icon like Neal Cassady was often remembered for the string of broken hearts that he left scattered across America, such activity was by no means the exclusive prerogative of men.[207] Indeed, the restless wanderlust that so famously motivated the protagonists of Kerouac's novels was clearly present in these women. Thus many bohemian women abandoned unsatisfying marriages and gravitated

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[203]Ibid., 103.

[204]Ibid., 94.

[205]Ibid.

[206]Ibid., 95.

[207]On Cassady's philandering, see Carolyn Cassady, *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

to places like Venice in order to seek more fulfilling relationships. Once they arrived, they asserted their independence and fully took part in the liberating potential of life in urban countercultures.

Conclusion

Women, African Americans and homosexuals in bohemian countercultures confronted similar opportunities and challenges. None of these groups attained complete acceptance or equality. There were relatively few African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos in the avant-garde communities of North Beach and Venice, and many white bohemians assumed that blacks personified a primitivism that served as a necessary counterpoint to the stifling and conformist characteristics of modern society. White bohemians also tended to confuse the presence of some racial minorities, particularly African Americans, in bars and coffeehouses with the integration of bohemia as a whole, but African Americans recognized that while certain individuals found acceptance, as a group they were not welcome in North Beach and Venice, where most whites, in contrast to many bohemians, wanted to preserve racial segregation. Furthermore, many bohemian men and women assumed that writing and painting were male endeavors, and some women replicated conventional gender roles by subordinating themselves to male intellectuals. Finally, heterosexual bohemians often failed to appreciate the difficulty that gay writers and artists experienced in accepting their sexual orientation. In sum, bohemians in North Beach and Venice were by no means immune to racism, sexism,

homophobia, or simple ignorance of the substantial difficulties that minorities confronted, even within intellectual communities that valorized adversarial attitudes and ways of life.

Nonetheless, bohemians challenged the homophobia, racism, and restrictive gender roles that pervaded postwar society. Racial intermixing was an important feature of postwar bohemianism, as a small number of Asian Americans, Latinos and African Americans lived in or frequented bohemian districts and often carved out niches for themselves as respected poets, painters or musicians. Furthermore, some bohemian couples redefined conventional gender roles by creating households in which women served as breadwinners while men functioned as housekeepers, and a few women asserted their intellectual equality within the artistic and literary circles of North Beach and Venice. Bohemian women who filled roles as mothers and housekeepers did not necessarily view themselves as trapped in the domestic sphere–in many cases, they felt that forgoing a comfortable home in the suburbs and exploring the creative ferment of bohemian districts indicated their refusal to conform to postwar norms. Finally, the intersection of queer and bohemian communities in North Beach and Venice meant that public spaces in which artists and writers congregated were not exclusively heterosexual or homosexual, and many bars and cafes in these districts legitimized same-sex attraction without marking those present as deviant or perverted. Indeed, bohemian countercultures were appealing precisely because they were not exclusively gay or straight, black or white, masculine or feminine, but rather validated a broad spectrum of alternative attitudes and practices. The extent to which African Americans, women and

homosexuals found acceptance in bohemia was always partial, contested and contradictory, yet the unconventionality that flourished in urban countercultures enabled these groups to attain a level of individual autonomy that was often difficult to sustain in many other parts of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the mass media often celebrated women as mothers and housekeepers, while the federal government launched campaigns against homosexual "perverts" and racist whites bitterly opposed the African American civil rights movement. Yet bohemians in Los Angeles and San Francisco often held very different attitudes toward women, homosexuals and racial minorities. In later years, such groups made increasingly radical demands for equality and acceptance, and by the early 1970s an array of social movements that centered on identity politics flourished. This reconfiguration of identity, both individual and social, was already well underway in the postwar years, and bohemian countercultures constituted an important arena in which homosexuals, women and racial minorities articulated and enacted more assertive and autonomous roles for themselves.

Chapter 4
"The Beatniks Were Not to Be Cowed:" The Regulation of Urban Space and Bohemian Political Activism

Of all the stereotypical characteristics associated with bohemians in the late 1950s and early 1960s, none was more prevalent than apathy. However good, bad, or incomprehensible their intentions seemed, virtually all observers agreed that postwar bohemians were utterly unconcerned with political issues and convinced that they could do nothing to alter the world around them. In some cases, bohemians themselves perpetuated this view. Kerouac reputedly expressed his "philosophical final statement" as "I don't know. I don't care. And it doesn't make any difference."[1] Lawrence Lipton, in his role as self-appointed spokesman for the beat generation, asserted that the beats "have turned their backs entirely on political solutions."[2] Moreover, a central trope used to portray bohemians was "passive," not only as an explicit descriptor in newspapers, magazines, and sociological studies but also in the disconsolate facial expressions of characters in movies like *The Beat Generation* and *A Bucket of Blood*, or the amiable laziness of the most famous televised beatnik, Maynard G. Krebs.[3] To judge from the

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[1]Nancy Wilson Ross, "Beat–and Buddhist," *New York Times*, 5 October 1958.

[2]"The Beatniks," CBS Radio Network, 1959, Lawrence Lipton tape no. 453, American Literature Collection, Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections, University of Southern California.

[3]A small list of representative examples from the print media include Joe Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," *This Week* (Sunday magazine of the *Los Angeles Times*), 28 September 1958, 5; Allen Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," *This World* (Sunday magazine of the *San Francisco Chronicle*), 15 June 1958, 5; Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith, *The Real Bohemia: A Sociological and Psychological Study of the "Beats"* (New York: Basic Books, 1961), 74; George B. Leonard, Jr., "The Bored, the

mass media, academic studies and some beat writers themselves, postwar bohemians seemed entirely disengaged from society.[4]

Such interpretations distort the political beliefs of bohemians and ignore their responses to contemporary events at both the local and national levels. This chapter argues that postwar bohemians were politically conscious and that harassment from municipal authorities catalyzed political activism among many artists and writers in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Bohemians who rejected electoral politics in the 1950s did so not because of innate apathy but rather as a response to their disillusionment with Popular Front activism of previous decades. Moreover, police, municipal agencies and conservative civic groups mounted campaigns of intimidation and harassment designed to eradicate bohemians from the enclaves in which they gathered. In response, bohemians allied with liberal groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, secured legal counsel to fight harassment in the courts, formed their own neighborhood associations to counter police misconduct, and organized rallies and protest marches.

Bearded, and the Beat," *Look*, 19 August 1958, 67; Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life*, 30 November 1959, 119; Herbert Gold, "What It Is–Whence It Came," *Playboy*, February 1958, 86; "The Blazing and the Beat," *Time*, 24 February 1958, 104; Kenneth Tynan, "San Francisco: The Rebels," *Holiday*, April 1961, 194. See also *The Beat Generation*, dir. Charles Haas, (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959), *A Bucket of Blood*, dir. Roger Corman (American International Pictures/Orion Pictures, 1959), and "Move Over, Perry Mason," *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, CBS, 13 October 1961.

[4]Paul S. George and Jerold M. Starr briefly assess police harassment of beats in Greenwich Village and North Beach, concluding that the "retreatist, apolitical Beats" "ironically" played a central role in the emergence of the New Left and the hippies; see "Beat Politics: New Left and Hippie Beginnings in the Postwar Counterculture," in Starr, ed., *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 227.

These efforts constituted a responsive activism, a form of politicization that derived in large part from reactions to harassment by outside forces, particularly the police. However, some bohemians participated in more proactive initiatives, including movements to secure African American civil rights and to end the Vietnam War.

For both bohemians and their opponents, the central issue was access to public space. In part, municipal governments wanted to make popular urban districts safe for tourists, who came to Venice and especially North Beach in large numbers. Yet municipal authorities also believed that bohemians threatened public morality by condoning narcotics, homosexuality and racial intermixing, and thus police increased their presence in urban districts known as gathering places for beatniks. Police and municipal agencies targeted bars and cafes where artists, writers and musicians congregated, harassing both the management and the customers, and this galvanized many bohemians to develop both individual and collective ways to defend their access to public space. Bohemians did not always agree about how to fight harassment: some believed that beatnik stereotypes should be countered with examples of the positive social contributions of avant-garde intellectuals, while others prided themselves on taunting tourists and police. Nonetheless, many people resisted efforts to repress the countercultures of Los Angeles and San Francisco. As one reporter observed of the skirmishes between the L.A. police department and artists and writers in Venice, "the

beatniks were not to be cowed."[5]

The Popular Front, the Cold War, and Countercultural Politics

The political beliefs of many bohemians in the Cold War years were strongly influenced by the Popular Front of the 1930s and 1940s. Centered in industrial cities and the unionization campaigns of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Popular Front included Communists and members of various radical splinter groups (Trotskyists, Lovestonites, Schatmanites, Socialists) as well as independent leftists and New Deal liberals who opposed fascism and supported the reforms of Franklin Roosevelt.[6] The Popular Front was especially strong in California. In 1934, workers in San Francisco launched a general strike in support of a unionization campaign among West Coast longshoremen, leading to bloody confrontations between strikers and the national guard, and in following years maritime, waterfront and hotel workers mounted additional strikes.[7] The Bay Area also hosted an active network of left wing intellectuals who

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[5]"Beatnik Hearing Becomes Fuzzy," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 2 September 1959, sec1, p. 5, "Beatniks" envelope, *Los Angeles Examiner* Collection, University of Southern California (hereafter *Examiner* Collection, USC).

[6]On the Popular Front as both a social movement and an influential force in American culture, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), and for an excellent analysis of how engagement with the Popular Front influenced one of the seminal texts of the post-World War II era, see Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

[7]David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 166-221; William Issel,

participated in anarchist, socialist, communist, and pacifist organizations.[8] Yet Popular Front intellectual life on the West Coast was strongest in Los Angeles, largely because the movie industry attracted both East Coast intellectuals who hoped to work as screenwriters and European playwrights, actors, directors and composers who fled the Nazis.[9] At a time when the undeniable crisis of the Depression, the renewal of labor activism and the bold initiatives of the New Deal inspired many native-born Californians to become more active in social causes, Hollywood experienced an influx of highly politicized intellectuals, including Communists active in the Screenwriters Guild and European emigres with direct experience of fascism.[10]

Many intellectuals who migrated to Venice and North Beach in the 1950s were "red-diaper babies" who remained politically engaged well into adulthood. Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg were emblematic in this regard: his father was a Socialist, his mother a Communist, and as a freshman at Columbia University he planned to earn a law degree

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"Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s," *Western Historical Quarterly* 22 (November 1991), 434.

[8]Linda Hamalian, "The Genesis of the San Francisco Renaissance: Literary and Political Current, 1945-1955," *Literary Review* 32 (Fall 1988): 5-6; Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 32-36.

[9]Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), 2-3, 96, 431-433.

[10]Ibid., 84-86, 94-98.

and defend labor organizers.[11] Yet ties to the Popular Front and the old left went well beyond literary celebrities. Writer and North Beach habitue Jerry Kamstra recalled that as a child in southern California, his "old time wobbly" father regaled him with stories of San Francisco as a city of "waterfront strikes and workers who united."[12] Similarly, a Venice bohemian recalled that her father was a "card-carrying Communist" during the 1930s and that as a young woman she made the "Party scene, marching in demonstrations, attending meetings."[13] This old left background encouraged some bohemians to participate in Popular Front political initiatives after World War II. African American poet Bob Kaufman worked as an organizer for the radical National Maritime Union in the mid 1940s.[14] Poet Stuart Perkoff wanted to join the Communist Party as a

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[11]Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 9, 11, 23.

[12]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950-1980* (no place: Peer Amid Press, 1980), chap. 3 p. 3, 6. Pagination for this self-published type-script is not continuous, and thus chapters are cited.

[13]Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), 92, 94.

[14]Mel Clay, *Jazz–Jail and God: An Impressionistic Biography of Bob Kaufman* (1988, reprint, San Francisco: Androgyne Books, 2001), 8; David Henderson, "Introduction," in Gerald Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar: Selected Poems by Bob Kaufman* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1996), 9. Verifying the details of Kaufman's political activism is difficult. Maria Damon notes that while Kaufman often claimed to have been an NMU member and a sibling corroborated his membership, her research into NMU records found no mention of Kaufman. See Damon, "Triangulated Desire and Tactical Silences in the Beat Hipscape: Bob Kaufman and Others," *College Literature* 27.1 (Winter 2000), 143; and Damon, *The Dark Edge of the Street: Margins in American Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 58, 254 n. 43. However, James Smethurst found evidence (in the form of articles and photographs in the NMU newspaper *The Pilot)* that Kaufman was active as an orator on behalf of the union and

high school student and turned himself in for failing to report for the draft in 1948 (he was 18 at the time, and his father convinced him to register because the military would never want him).[15] In the mid 1950s, Perkoff was fired from at least two jobs for attempting to unionize employees, which led to suspicion that he was a Communist.[16] Furthermore, this Popular Front background often encouraged avant-garde intellectuals in various left wing sects to cooperate in opposing Cold War anti-Communism. African American painter Arthur Monroe recalled that among artists in New York and San Francisco in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "Socialists, Anarchists and Communists shared general causes in which they all believed," including "the rights of the Castro revolution in Cuba to determine its own destiny."[17] Thus a substantial number of artists and writers grew up in politically conscious families and participated in various progressive causes throughout the late 1940s and 1950s.

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served on strike mobilization committees, although he did not play a major role in the organization itself. See Smethurst, "'Remembering When Indians Were Red:' Bob Kaufman, the Popular Front, and the Black Arts Movement," *Callaloo* 25.1 (2002), 146, 161 n. 1.

[15]John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 62-63.

[16]Stuart Z. Perkoff, journal no. 31, Perkoff Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter Perkoff Papers, UCLA). Perkoff believed that a CP member from the Smelter Workers Union tried to divert attention from his own unionization work by telling the management that Perkoff was a Communist.

[17]Arthur Monroe, "The Decade of Bebop, Beatniks, and Painting," http://www.somarts.org/beat/beat_text.html, p. 1, accessed from the internet 28 July 2002.

However, when Cold War anti-Communism and the demagoguery of politicians like Joseph McCarthy decimated the Popular Front, many avant-garde intellectuals maintained their concern with social issues but simultaneously developed greater interest in cultural politics and individual liberation.[18] For some, the Cold War encouraged a reconsideration of their political commitments. One Venice writer noted that his parents "brought me up to believe that the working class was the hope of the world and all the time they were falling for the Stalinist dictatorship."[19] Yet many artists and writers affiliated with the Popular Front were motivated not by an ideological loyalty to a specific party but rather by an idealistic belief in social change. Perkoff identified himself as a "socialist/zionist/communist" at an early age and gravitated toward left wing radicalism because it validated his hope that "the community of love might be actualized into social relationships."[20] Looking back on his commitment to socialism, Perkoff concluded that "It was, primarily, the belief that it can *now* be the good society, and that, if I could see it, how could I not attempt to bring it about?"[21] Thus a utopian idealism undergirded the political commitments of many avant-garde intellectuals, and when the Cold War and the undeniable brutality of Stalinist Communism combined to weaken the old left, many

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[18]On the domestic impact of Cold War anti-Communism, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998) and Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2003), chaps. 9-15.

[19]*Holy Barbarians*, 107.

[20]Perkoff, journal nos. 46 and 18, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[21]Perkoff, journal no. 42, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

writers and artists reoriented their radical impulses toward finding new forms of individual fulfillment and creative self-expression. By 1960, Perkoff arrived at "an acceptance of the inability to alter the exterior world, and an acceptance of the alteration of the interior world."[22] Furthermore, as Monroe succinctly concluded, many avant-garde intellectuals believed that "one could abandon radical politics while remaining subversive on questions of culture and society."[23] If left wing social movements seemed untenable in the age of McCarthy, individual responses to the consumerism, homophobia and racism that permeated postwar society took on greater relevance. However, bohemians enacted such responses publicly and collectively, in the bars and coffeehouses of urban districts where writers and artists congregated, and this elicited a bitter backlash from municipal agencies, police and conservative civic groups.

The Repression of Bohemian Countercultures in San Francisco

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, San Francisco was known as a "wide-open town" that hosted lewd entertainments such as gambling, prostitution, and seedy taverns. Such diversions catered to the single young men who worked in the shipping industry and composed a large proportion of the population. Corruption among police and political leaders (funded by steady profits from the owners of brothels and gambling houses), along with relatively little public support for anti-vice

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[22]Perkoff, journal no. 37, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[23]Monroe, 1.

campaigns, meant that San Francisco police often walked a fine line between a tacit refusal to interfere in red-light districts and an official mandate to confine salacious entertainment to legal activities.[24] North Beach was at the northern edge of the old Barbary Coast, one of the most notorious red-light sections of the city, and while gambling and prostitution in the Coast had long since been eliminated by the 1950s, North Beach was still regarded by many San Franciscans as an area where unconventional entertainment was widely available, including cross-dressing performances in clubs like Finocchio's, bars such as the Black Cat and Vesuvio's where "real" poets and painters congregated, and venues like hungry i, which featured the "sick" comedy of Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce.[25] By the late 1950s, the status of North Beach as the capital of the beat generation drew many writers and artists to the district, along with growing numbers of tourists who came to glimpse beatniks.

When North Beach became more popular as both a tourist destination and an artistic colony, police increased their presence in the district in order to ensure that tourists remained safe and that bohemians obeyed the law. Municipal authorities were particularly concerned about narcotics use, and thus the police department assigned more patrolmen to North Beach almost immediately after the beat generation made headlines.

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[24]Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (1933; reprint, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, no date); William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Franciso, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 71, 75, 107-109, 192.

[25]Charles A. Fracchia, *City by the Bay: A History of Modern San Francisco, 1945-Present* (Los Angeles: Heritage Media, 1997), 40-41.

Police chief Frank Ahern acknowledged that police began patrolling the district with greater frequency shortly after the *San Francisco Examiner* ran a series on the beats in May 1958. Ahern told reporters that "so far it hasn't been a problem which calls for a mass crackdown, but we certainly plan to keep our eye on the situation."[26] Similarly, the mayor denied that bohemians were a problem but warned that the rise of narcotics use in North Beach and fears of an ensuing crime wave necessitated a greater police presence in the area. Insisting that "marijuana and art" should not "go together," the mayor sought to "differentiate between artists and people with demented minds" who "need medical treatment."[27] Yet Charles Borland, the police captain whose jurisdiction included North Beach, declared that the cluster of bohemian bars and cafes on Grant Avenue "has become a notorious problem section, and unless drastic measures are taken [it] will become completely out of hand."[28] Despite cautious pronouncements from the mayor and the chief of police, the captain directly responsible for North Beach made it clear that the district was now under heightened surveillance. For the police, a key goal to ensure the safety of tourists. Borland noted a pattern in which "Beatniks came to North Beach," then "tourists came to stare at them," and finally "hustlers and boosters came to work on

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[26]"Girl Killer Is Charged," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 June 1958, no sec., n. p., "Harris, Frank–Murder" envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings Morgue, San Francisco History Center (hereafter *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC).

[27]"Mayor Eyes Problem of 'Beat' Group," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 June 1958, no sec., n. p., "Sublette, Connie–Murdered Beat Generation Girl" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[28]"Girl Killer Is Charged."

the tourists."[29] Similarly, one North Beach resident complained that tourists "have too much money," and thus "the police are in here thick to protect the monied, respectable people."[30] Salacious entertainment had lured tourists to this part of San Francisco for decades, and by the late 1950s municipal leaders wanted to ensure that the unconventionality which made North Beach popular neither endangered tourists nor encouraged illegal behavior among the bohemians who lived in and frequented the district.

The growing police presence in North Beach meant increased surveillance of public space, the bars and cafes that attracted both avant-garde intellectuals and tourists, and this led to harassment of business owners and their regular customers. Police targeted some of the most well-known venues in the district, including the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, the Place, the Coffee Gallery and Miss Smith's Tea Room, all clustered on Grant Avenue.[31] The Bagel Shop, widely promoted by the mass media as the "capital" of Bay Area bohemianism, was a focal point for harassment.[32] A precinct sergeant told owner Jay Hoppe, "Now that you made the papers, you're going to get trouble," and then

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[29]O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 130.

[30]Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 22 June 1958, 6.

[31]"Girl Killer Is Charged."

[32]For portrayals of the Bagel Shop as the main beat hangout in San Francisco, see Hyams, "Good-by [sic] to the Beatniks," 34; O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 129; Brown, "Life and Love among the Beatniks," 4.

walked out without any explanation.[33] His meaning soon became clear, as police routinely entered the premises and demanded that patrons produce proof of employment. Police also threatened to arrest Bagel Shop employees without naming specific charges and parked a patrol wagon out front to scare away customers.[34] Yet bohemians faced harassment not only in bars and cafes but in any public area. Jerry Kamstra recalled that "chicks were arrested for the heinous crime of going barefoot, and dudes for reading poetry on the corner without permits," while a photographer lamented that "I had a beard but the cops started arresting everyone with beards so I shaved mine off."[35] Pierre Delattre, a minister who ran the Bread and Wine Mission in North Beach, charged that police, seeking any possible excuse to make arrests, would "shout obscenities from their cruiser cars," and "if someone hollers back, he's arrested." He noted one instance in which "a nice young girl, a dancer and no Beatnik, was accosted by two policemen as she came out of the Cassandra Coffee Shop" and "grilled" with questions like "Why do you come to this area?"[36] The phrase "a dancer and no Beatnik" reflected the desire of some North Beach bohemians to distance themselves from the beat label, which the mass media

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[33]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 159.

[34]"Ahern Denies 'Going After' Bagel Shop," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 July 1958, no sec., n. p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[35]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 p. 50; photographer qtd. in June Muller, "Most Merchants Glad They're Gone," *San Francisco Examiner*, 6 August 1962, no sec., p. 18, "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[36]Wes Willoughby, "Charge Harassment by Cops" [title incomplete], *San Francisco News*, 14 April 1959, no sec., n. p., "Delattre, Pierre; Reverend of the Beats" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

and municipal leaders associated not merely with laziness and apathy but also with illegal drug use and criminal pathology.[37] Delattre implied a distinction between beatniks, who engaged in criminal behavior, and the broader counterculture of North Beach, which tolerated activities that were unconventional but not illegal. However, municipal authorities assumed that almost any habitue of the bars and cafes along Grant Avenue was prone to illegal behavior, and during the summer of 1958 San Francisco police implemented a policy of systematic intimidation of the bohemians in North Beach.

Many bars in North Beach attracted both avant-garde intellectuals and homosexuals, and thus police and state agencies assumed that enforcing morality in the district was paramount. This in turn meant that harassment of bohemians and homosexuals often occurred simultaneously.[38] When the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) declined to renew liquor licenses for Miss Smith's Tea Room and the Black Cat, it did so on the basis of sexual deviance, ruling, in the words of the *San Francisco Examiner*, that each nightclub was "a resort for sex perverts."[39] Yet both homosexuals and avant-garde intellectuals patronized these establishments, and thus state government campaigns against the queer culture of North Beach also targeted its bohemian counterculture. Moreover, the ABC often invoked a

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[37]For an analysis of how mass-media depictions of the beat generation portrayed bohemianism, see chap. 1 of this dissertation.

[38]On homosexuals in bohemian countercultures, see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[39]"Black Cat Liquor Ban Upheld," *San Francisco Examiner*, 30 May 1958, no sec., n. p., and "More Bars Disciplined," *San Francisco Examiner*, 1957 [day and month illegible], no sec., n. p., both in "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

moralistic framework when denying liquor licenses in North Beach, regardless of whether or not the business in question had a large gay or lesbian clientele. Unlike the Black Cat, the Bagel Shop did not attract a substantial number of homosexuals, yet the ABC revoked the liquor licenses of both establishments on the basis of morality, claiming that the Black Cat constituted a "danger" to the "morals and health" of the public and accusing the Bagel Shop of being "contrary to public welfare and morals."[40] Thus the agency targeted both homosexuals and bohemians for the same reason, invoking morals and public welfare to denounce public spaces where each group gathered. For the state government, upholding morality in San Francisco meant that neither homosexuals nor bohemians should congregate publicly.

However, nothing aroused more opposition to bohemians than racial intermixing in bars and coffeehouses. Significantly, just six years before the beat generation made headlines, North Beach was the focal point of an attempt by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to challenge racist public housing policies in San Francisco. In 1952, the NAACP successfully sued the San Francisco Housing Authority to grant African Americans access to public housing in North Beach. Because there was relatively little public housing in San Francisco, this decision did not fundamentally alter patterns of residential segregation in the city or in North Beach, but it did mean that

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[40]William Thomas, "Homosexual Rights in Bars Argued," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 September 1957, no sec., n. p., and "Bagel Shop Faces Loss of License," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 September 1960, no sec., n. p., both in "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

blacks could now compete with whites for the few public dwellings available.[41] The attempt of the Housing Authority to exclude African Americans from public housing in North Beach underscored the extent to which many white San Franciscans wanted to uphold racial segregation. Furthermore, hostility to racial intermixing was deeply rooted in older generations of Italian Americans who lived and worked in North Beach. Italians who migrated to San Francisco in the early twentieth century settled mainly in North Beach, and while some of their descendants moved to the suburbs after World War II, the district still contained a substantial number of Italian Americans in the postwar decades, many of whom owned small businesses.[42] In the mid 1960s, the writer Kenneth Rexroth talked with the "Old Guard of residents, property owners and operators of the long established businesses" in North Beach: "What did I hear? Get rid of the beatniks. Run out the Negroes. Close the inter-racial places."[43] Finally, much of this hostility toward racial intermixing was inextricably tied to anxieties regarding civil rights struggles in other parts of the country. As the African American painter Arthur Monroe concluded, "the conspiracy of the police department was linked to the other side of the civil rights movement. They knew what was going on across the other side of the country," with "all

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[41]Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 223-226.

[42]Brian J. Godfrey, *Neighborhoods in Transition: The Making of San Francisco's Ethnic and Nonconformist Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 80-82, 115.

[43]Rexroth, "Corruption in North Beach," *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 April 1965, sec. 2, p. 2.

those people down in Mississippi" working in voter registration campaigns.[44] Thus many white police officers and Italian Americans regarded North Beach as off limits to African Americans, and this motivated much of the harassment bohemians encountered.

The focal points of such harassment were the public spaces in which bohemians congregated. In the summer of 1958, a police officer explicitly contrasted a predominantly black section of San Francisco with North Beach when he told the owner of the Bagel Shop, "You have never cooperated with us; you guys are trying to turn this place into a little Fillmore, but we're going to stop it before it goes too far."[45] One restaurant owner was asked by the police, "Why do you allow so many Commies [Communists] and jigs to patronize this place? After all, if you give 'em an inch, they'll take a mile."[46] Many bohemians believed that William Bigarani, a white policeman assigned to North Beach, harbored "a real hatred for Beatniks."[47] Kamstra recalled one occasion when Bigarani entered the Bagel Shop and walked through the crowd with his attention "focused absolutely on the faces and forms" of blacks and whites sitting

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[44]Personal interview with Arthur Monroe, 1 August 2002.

[45]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 163. During World War II, a substantial number of African Americans moved to the Bay Area, some of whom settled in homes along Fillmore St., a few miles west of North Beach, and in later years many whites sought to confine the black population of the city to the Fillmore district; see Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 104, 169.

[46]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 163, brackets in original.

[47]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 13.

together.[48] While the actual number of African Americans who resided in or frequented North Beach remained small, their visibility in bars and cafes regarded as white spaces provoked an intense backlash from police and Italian Americans, who feared that the presence of blacks in North Beach would undermine racial segregation in San Francisco.[49] Furthermore, white hostility to African Americans was exacerbated by the fact that racial intermixing occurred in public spaces already tainted by the presence of homosexuals and beatniks.

The danger that bohemian racial intermixing represented for racist San Franciscans was most potently embodied by interracial couples. As Kamstra recalled, "Bigarani's favorite targets were black dudes with white chicks:" "When Big B [sic] saw black and white he couldn't contain himself. He'd stop the couple, accuse the chick of being a hustler and the dude of being a pimp, and threaten to run them in the next time he saw them on the street."[50] On one occasion, police stopped a convertible with a white woman driving and a black man in the passenger seat. The officer said to the woman, "Hey, nigger-lover, let's see your license," and demanded, "What are you doing with this nigger?" The police eventually let the couple go but told the woman, "Don't let us catch you around here again with a Negro" or "we'll run you in" on vagrancy charges usually

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[48]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 p. 41.

[49]On African American intellectuals and race relations among bohemians, see chap. 3 of this dissertation.

[50]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 p. 49-50.

used in prostitution cases.[51] If the threat to arrest this woman as a prostitute implied that white policemen understood relationships between black men and white women strictly within a pimp-hustler framework, the initial statement by the officer suggested a concern not with prostitution but rather with the erosion of racial boundaries proscribing romantic and sexual relationships between whites and blacks. Such fears led to especially virulent harassment of interracial couples who married and had children. African American poet Bob Kaufman and his wife Eileen, who married in the late 1950s and had a son, were a case in point. As Eileen recalled, the police "were against us from the git-go [sic]. We were one of the first blatant interracial couples in North Beach that stayed together and had children. So they were afraid of a pattern there."[52] This pattern went well beyond intermixing in bars and cafes to encompass a racial redefinition of the nuclear family, one of the most valorized institutions in postwar America but one typically portrayed as middle class, suburban, and white.[53] In sum, interracial relationships among bohemians, whether casual or long-term, catalyzed white anxieties about the maintenance of both public and private racial segregation: black men and white women in romantic, sexual

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[51]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 164.

[52]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 13-14. A photographer who knew Eileen believed that was of mixed African American and Irish descent; see Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 10. Eileen's assertion that she and Bob were a "blatant interracial" couple suggests that she identified as white and that police believed she and Bob were a racially mixed couple.

[53]See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), and Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Journalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

and marital relationships in North Beach functioned as potent symbols of integration for racist whites, and thus racial intermixing was one of the most despised features of postwar bohemianism.

The Repression of Bohemian Countercultures in Los Angeles

Unlike San Francisco, Los Angeles had no reputation for its red-light districts nor unconventional writers and artists. Indeed, intellectuals who arrived from the East Coast and especially western Europe often complained that the city lacked any hint of the café life that made strolling through the Montmartre or Greenwich Village so invigorating.[54] This changed in the late 1950s, when local and national publicity surrounding the beat generation led to the mushrooming of coffeehouses throughout Los Angeles, many of which catered to customers seeking countercultural chic along with their espresso. If this inaugurated a new phase in the cultural life of the city, it also caught municipal leaders and law enforcement officials by surprise: the growing number of coffeehouses that attracted avant-garde intellectuals and their hangers-on endangered the idyllic view that many white Angelenos held of their city as a haven of restorative sunshine and middle-class home ownership.[55]

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[54]Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to the Present* (New York: Viking, 1983), 54, 235; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1992), 49-50.

[55]On the efforts of business elites to promote Los Angeles as a bastion of white middle-class prosperity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Davis, *City of Quartz*, 25-26.

Moreover, municipal leaders in Los Angeles feared that the growing number of coffeehouses were havens not only for unconventional writers and artists but also for juvenile delinquents, and this led to harassment of the owners and the customers of many cafes. In 1959, the L.A. Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance requiring all-night coffeehouses to attain entertainment permits from the county and forcing them to close at two a.m. unless they acquired a special permit from the sheriff's office.[56] Reflecting the pervasive fear of juvenile delinquency in postwar America, these regulations marked coffeehouses as bastions of teenage rebellion.[57] According to one sergeant at the sheriff's department, an investigation by plainclothes officers determined that cafes on the Sunset Strip were gathering places for young people who "sit all night" and thus posed a "potential" problem.[58] The *Los Angeles Mirror News* reported that coffeehouse owners "complain deputies and policemen unnecessarily make a show of visiting their places, flashing lights into the faces of customers and demanding identifications."[59] Other entrepreneurs highlighted the anti-intellectual bias of municipal authorities. One café owner opined that in Los Angeles, "the average cop thinks there is something subversive

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[56]"All-Night Coffee Houses to Pay Entertainment Tax," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 23 January 1959, "Beatniks" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[57]On juvenile delinquency in postwar America, see James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). On teenagers, see Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

[58]"All-Night Coffee Houses."

[59]Frank Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks from L.A. Coffee Houses," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 2 June 1959, sec. 2, p. 1.

about any place with paintings on its wall. He thinks an artist is a suspicious character, partly because of the way he may dress and partly because the officer holds art itself suspect."[60] Yet regardless of whether law enforcement officials were motivated by a philistine disdain for intellectuals or a concern with juvenile delinquents, their underlying assumption was that coffeehouses suddenly became popular because they encouraged illegal activity, particularly narcotics use. This was certainly the case with the Unicorn, a hangout for folk musicians that was immediately successful when it opened on the Strip on 1957. As co-owner Theodore Bikel recalled, "the cops could not understand the success of the place. They kept coming in, first the uniformed cops and then the plainclothes men, to see what underhanded hippie-type business we were conducting that attracted such crowds." When Bikel told police that he sold nothing but coffees and cakes, one officer demanded to know why "all these people are here? What else are you selling?" On one occasion, police claimed that a line of people waiting to get into the overcrowded Unicorn constituted a public problem and issued Bikel a ticket, despite the fact that area nightclubs had similar lines.[61] As in San Francisco, municipal authorities in Los Angeles instituted policies that led to the harassment and intimidation of public spaces where writers, artists and musicians congregated.

The fiercest campaigns against L.A. bohemians occurred in Venice, where a coalition of conservative residents and business groups concluded that the presence of

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[60]Ibid.

[61]Theodore Bikel, *Theo: The Autobiography of Theodore Bikel*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 161, 162.

beatniks threatened the property values of the economically stagnant district and moreover endangered the moral fiber of the community.[62] The Venice Civic Union, which claimed 500 members, spearheaded the effort to eradicate the Gas House from its prominent position on the Ocean Front Walk.[63] The president of the Union, realtor Alfred S. Roberts, proclaimed indignantly that "We've got to get on our feet and scream and get these people out of here."[64] When the L.A. Police Commission held hearings to determine if the Gas House should receive an entertainment permit, members of the Civic Union, the Marina Peninsula Property Owners Association, the Women's Civic Club and other groups came to testify against the innundation of beatniks in Venice, forcing the police to move the hearing to a larger venue.[65] Some of this opposition rested on little more than the offended sensibilities of the bourgeoisie: one woman said she visited the Gas House and found people "acting nonchalant," while Roberts hurled invective after witnessing "a bathtub in the middle of the room with a man just sitting in it. Just–sitting in it!"[66] Other complaints centered on the nuisance that bohemians posed, with their

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[62]When *Life* did a feature on the beats in 1959, it briefly noted the tendency of conservative Venetians to "moan about property values" whenever they discussed beatniks; see O'Neil, "Only Rebellion Around," 129.

[63]Ted Thackery, Jr., "Gas House Hearing a 'Drag, Man,'" *Los Angeles Examiner*, 28 August 1959, no sec. n. p., "Lawrence Lipton" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[64]"Venice Landlords Fight Beatnik Art Clubhouse," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 31 July 1959, no sec. n. p., "Venice, CA" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[65]Thackery, "Gas House Hearing."

[66]Ibid.

incessant bongo drumming and a hearse parked outside the coffeehouse that made elderly Venetians uncomfortable.[67] Yet most who testified highlighted the "immoral actions" that abounded at the café, including the presence of "known narcotics addicts" and nude women modeling for painters in the presence of underage youth.[68] Much of this testimony came from Michael Kelly, a Venice resident who, working undercover for Roberts, posed as a beatnik and frequented the Gas House for a month and a half. Kelly stated that habitues shared beer and wine with each other and that some juveniles drank alcohol.[69] A more disturbing factor was homosexuality, as newspapers often noted testimony regarding the presence of "sex perverts" at the Gas House.[70] One man told a reporter that he "associated with that group" at the Gas House for over a month, and discovered "subversive activities" and "queer goings on" among "lesbians and homosexuals."[71] Furthermore, racial intermixing among bohemians motivated opposition to the Gas House. Venice contained a small number of African Americans as well as

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[67]"Bongos Soul Soothing, Beatnik Hearing Told," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1959, sec. 1, p. 5; Jerry Hulse, "Wine, Nude Models Liven Up Beatnik Capital, Witness Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1959, sec. 1, p. 10.

[68]Jerry Hulse, "Beatniks Beat Bongos in Basement, Hearing Told," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1959, sec. 1, p. 2; "Beatniks 'Cut Out' of Hearing," *Los Angeles Examiner*, no date, "Venice, CA" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC; "Beats Want to Be Pals, Dig It?" *Los Angeles Examiner*, 29 August 1959, no sec., n. p., "Beatniks" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[69]Hulse, "Wind, Nude Models."

[70]"Beatnik Hearing Becomes Fuzzy."

[71]"The Beatniks," CBS Radio Network, 1959. This man was probably Kelly, but he does not reveal his identity.

Latinos, but residential segregation in the district meant that many whites rarely interacted with blacks.[72] To bolster the case for denying a permit, the Police Commission submitted as evidence a letter from a Venice resident who claimed that "Half of the men there are colored and white beats are walking around with them arm in arm."[73] For people like Roberts, "normal citizens" simply did not engage in such "unbecoming" behavior.[74] In sum, the Venice Civic Union and other groups sought not merely to defend their community against the immorality of underage drinking and narcotics but more importantly to guard against far more serious threats from homosexuals and African Americans. Within the veneer of middle-class respectability, opponents of the Gas House sought to defend heterosexuality and racial segregation in Venice.

The Venice West Café was also a target of harassment, largely because the police regarded it as a hangout for narcotics dealers. Some habitues of the coffeehouse, such as Stuart Perkoff, did go there to buy heroin and other drugs.[75] Owner John Kenevan threw

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[72]Santa Monica, a few miles north of Venice, contained a sizable black population; see Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 110, and map 4. Venice also contained a sizable Latino population composed predominantly of Mexican Americans; see Raymond A. Rocco, "Latino Los Angeles: Reframing Boundaries/Border," in Allen J. Scott and Edward J. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 367.

[73]Letter from attorney A. L. Wirin to Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, 8 October 1959, Lawrence Lipton Collection, box 4 folder 24, Department of Special Collections, USC (hereafter Lipton Collection, USC).

[74]Thackery, "Gas House Hearing."

[75]Perkoff, journal nos. 31 and 42, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

people out if he suspected they were dealing, but he did not call the police, who assumed that anyone present was involved in the drug trade.[76] Another regular customer, John Haag, quickly concluded that the police were "fixated" on "this idea that the whole crowd was infected" with "criminality." This fixation led to repeated harassment, as police often shined their searchlights into the café window and came inside to demand that everyone produce identification. After Haag bought the café, police singled him out as a target. A favorite tactic was to ticket him for parking in front of the coffeehouse to unload supplies, which meant appearing in court "week after week" and finally led a frustrated judge to forbid police from issuing such citations. This intimidation "got me into court and screwed me up to some extent," but overall such measures struck Haag as "really silly." Racial intermixing also led the police to target Haag. He once sat in a car late at night talking to an interracial couple, and suddenly the police drove up and began to question him. As Haag concluded, when police discovered racial intermixing among coffeehouse habitues, "there's nothing else to see."[77]

The battle between conservative Venetians and bohemians continued into the mid 1960s, when noise complaints provided yet another opportunity to denounce beatnik immorality and deprive bohemians of access to public space. In response to allegations from Venice residents about incessant bongo drumming at all hours of the night, the Los Angeles city council passed an ordinance in 1965 that prohibited playing any musical

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[76]Personal interview with John Haag, 24 April 2002.

[77]Ibid.

instrument in parks or beaches near residential buildings from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.[78] Not content with this legal victory, councilman Karl Rundberg, who represented Venice, rebuked bohemians for having "warped brains" and "denying the right of thousands of people to live as decent citizens. I'm not going to give up until I run this scum out of Venice!"[79] Mayor Samuel Yorty agreed, affirming that "If you had people outside your home beating bongo drums all night, I'm sure you'd feel the same as Mr. Rundberg."[80] Significantly, the chief complaint of Rundberg was not noise but rather morality, the extent to which the mere existence of "warped" bohemians threatened the well being of "decent citizens" everywhere. As with efforts to close the Gas House and harass habitues of the Venice West Café, this vitriolic condemnation demonstrated that for many Angelenos, bohemians seemed not merely a nuisance but rather a cancer on the body politic, a menace whose "warped" way of life endangered Venice and, by extension, Los Angeles itself.

The Political Mobilization of Bohemians in North Beach

In response to repression from police and municipal governments, bohemians developed both individual and collective strategies to defend themselves. Because

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[78]Jack Smith, "Bohemians Make City Hall Scene, but Lose Battle of Bongos," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1965, sec. 2, p. 1.

[79]Jack Smith, "Beach Bongo Ban Fails in Council," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 June 1965, sec. 2, p. 10. Rundberg had recently lost re-election, and he may have used the bongo issue to capture headlines during his final weeks in office.

[80]Smith, "Bohemians Make City Hall Scene."

harassment often targeted the bars, coffeehouses and parks where bohemians congregated, defending access to such public spaces was a central component of their political activism. A few individuals openly confronted police officers who patrolled North Beach, which only heightened tensions and in some cases led to brutal physical abuse. More often, bohemians worked collectively, forming neighborhood associations to coordinate their response to police misconduct, organizing public rallies and protests to publicize their grievances and galvanize support, and using informal networks to collect bail money quickly when individuals were singled out for repeated intimidation by police.

The Co-Existence Bagel Shop was a focal point for confrontations between bohemians and police in North Beach. One reason for this was that a police call box was located on the sidewalk in front of the bistro, and thus patrolmen and bohemians could not avoid interacting. An equally important factor was that the clientele consisted not of tourists but rather of artists and writers who lived in North Beach and often witnessed or experienced some form of harassment. Thus intellectuals who resided in the district and regularly gathered at the Bagel Shop played a central role in confrontations with police. In some cases, fighting the police simply meant refusing to cooperate with them. Newspaper columnist Herb Caen noted one occasion when two patrolmen entered the Bagel Shop, announced that they were going to file vagrancy charges against anyone present who could not produce proof of employment, and were "greeted with such a roar

of laughter" that they "wavered, fell back, broke ranks, [and] fled in vagrant confusion."[81] Writers and artists also found numerous ways to mock the police. There was a swastika painted on the call box outside the Bagel Shop, and intellectuals such as Jerry Kamstra found it "particularly appropriate" that this "sign of another time that every Beat was psychically aware of" was now being used to rebuke the police.[82] After several painters were arrested at a party for disturbing the peace, bohemians hung an effigy of officer Bigarani on a telephone pole outside the Bagel Shop (it lasted only ten minutes before police removed it).[83] On another occasion, Bob Kaufman and William Margolis posted poems in the window of the Bagel Shop denouncing the police as the agents of state oppression: "One day Adolph [sic] Hitler had nothing to do / . . . . So he moved to San Francisco, became an ordinary / Policeman, devoted himself to stamping out Beatniks." The poem denounced the "rotting souls" and "rancid foetid nightstick bones" of the officers who patrolled North Beach.[84] Thus many artists and writers regarded the Bagel Shop as much more than a hangout or a "scene:" it was a valued community institution that they deemed worthy of defending and an arena in which to repudiate publicly

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[81]Herb Caen, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 May 1958, no sec., n p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[82]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 p. 43.

[83]"Beatnik–'Fuzz' Beef," *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 August 1959, no sec., n.p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[84]Arthur Hoppe, "Lawman Rips Poems off Wall," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 August 1959, no sec., p. 4., "Kaufman, Bob–SF Poet" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

harassment and intimidation by police.

The desire of bohemians to use public spaces as environments in which to criticize the police placed business owners in an awkward situation. This was especially for Jay Hoppe, the proprietor of the Bagel Shop. As the owner of a bistro that police identified as a problem and intellectuals esteemed as a social center, Hoppe had to negotiate with both groups merely to stay in business. After the incendiary poetry of Kaufman and Margolis appeared in the window, a police captain declared that unless the poems were removed, "we will have to take legal action to abate that place as a public nuisance."[85] Hoppe quickly complied, acknowledging that "this is knuckling under. But I like owning the Bagel Shop."[86] He noted that "North Beach has many legitimate gripes against the Police Department and vice versa," but insisted that "if I'd been here I never would have let those poems be posted in the first place. And I've told all my employees not to let anything like this happen again on pain of dismissal."[87] Similarly, when Kaufman tried to post the poems at the Cassandra coffee shop, owner Monty Pike refused and noted bluntly that "I am trying to get a beer license."[88] Business owners like Hoppe and Pike did not want to alienate local artists and writers by appearing to side with the police, yet they recognized that antagonizing the officers who patrolled the district would

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[85]Ibid.

[86]"Bagel Shop Banishes Beatniks' Cop Poetry," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 August 1959, no sec., p. 2, "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Hoppe, "Lawman Rips Poems."

probably result in the revocation of their liquor licenses. Thus bohemian entrepreneurs confronted the paradox of trying to please two mutually antagonistic groups, and they often relented to police pressure out of sheer economic necessity.

Bar owners whose clientele included homosexuals faced particularly intense harassment, and one such individual invoked bohemian unconventionality to defend the presence of gays and lesbians at his establishment. In the later 1950s, attacks on bars frequented by homosexuals increased throughout the Bay Area, as municipal leaders, the state Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC), and officials at military bases mounted a coordinated campaign against queer public space.[89] Sol Stoumen, owner of the Black Cat, fought repeated attempts by the ABC to revoke his liquor license.[90] During one ABC hearing in 1957, Stoumen testified that "I'm not interested in the sex habits of my customers. I suspect but don't know of any actual homosexuals in my place."[91] Yet Stoumen emphasized that "My patrons are merely members of the bohemian intelligentsia who gather at the Black Cat to discuss art and semantics, in the best San Francisco tradition."[92] After identifying his customers as bohemians, Stoumen

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[89]Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 108-146.

[90]Ibid., 145. See also Thomas, "Homosexual Rights in Bars Argued."

[91]"Black Cat's Owner Defends Bohemians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1957, no sec., n p., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

[92]Mildred Hamilton, "A Gallery with a Colorful Past and a Youthful Future," *San Francisco Examiner*, 14 August 1979, no sec., p. 19., "Cafes" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

then tried to justify bohemia itself: "Let us not be stuffy," he insisted, the term "bohemian" "has reference to a way of life, a way of thinking. It has no reference whatever to moral or immoral conduct. Bohemians are people who work at jobs some of the time, then shift to a pet project. . . . Maybe it's a crackpot thing, but they believe in it."[93] Thus Stoumen acknowledged that homosexuals might frequent the Black Cat, but he attempted to shift the focus of the hearing from sexual "perversion" to countercultural eccentricity by highlighting his avant-garde clientele and their idiosyncratic behavior. In essence, astute bar owners used bohemianism to camouflage homosexuality by invoking the "best San Francisco tradition" of tolerating unconventional personalities and conduct.

In addition to homophobia, racism motivated much of the harassment bohemians encountered, yet it also encouraged some African American intellectuals to adopt a militant posture toward the police. Few individuals confronted police with greater intestinal fortitude than African American writer Bob Kaufman. Kaufman was well known in the district as an outspoken poet with a fiercely provocative personality, and this often led to skirmishes with patrolmen. As his wife Eileen recalled, the police "didn't like it when he hopped up on tables and spouted poetry," and because "he was so vivacious and thus dominated the whole scene, he appeared as the leader."[94] Moreover,

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[93]"Black Cat's Owner Defends Bohemians," ellipses in original.

[94]Qtd. in Nicosia, *Cranial Guitar*, 13-14 and Tony Seymour, "Don't Forget Bob Kaufman," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 25 April 1976, no sec., n. p., "Kaufman, Bob–SF Poet" envelope, *Examiner* Morgue, SFHC.

Bob "was more frank than a lot of people about the police" and "baited them a lot."[95] As a result, one friend recalled, he was "targeted by the police as a subversive" and arrested 36 times in one year alone.[96] Police often took Kaufman to the Hall of Justice, stopped the elevator between floors and beat him severely, yet such incidents only reinforced his belligerent disdain for the cops.[97] In particular, Kaufman directed his ire at Bigarani, who, as Kamstra noted, considered Kaufman "the incarnation of the Devil."[98] A friend recalled one occasion when Bigarani tore down poems that were tacked to a bulletin board in the Bagel Shop, at which point Kaufman "stood up and pissed on the guy's pants."[99] To a certain extent, such behavior involved living up to his reputation as "a poet wild with words," and each confrontation with Bigarani inside the Bagel Shop was, as Kamstra observed, "a frequent and always crowd pleasing event."[100] Yet the militant posture that Kaufman exhibited toward police was also shaped by the racial dynamics of bohemian countercultures: racial intermixing was common among North Beach bohemians, yet blacks remained a highly visible but very small minority in a predominantly white neighborhood. Black bohemians were constantly threatened by

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[95]Seymour, "Don't Forget Bob Kaufman."

[96]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 13.

[97]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 pp. 43-44.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 13.

[100]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 p. 43.

harassment from racist police, who were outraged by the presence of African Americans in an urban area that many whites regarded as their own. Thus, racial intermixing among bohemians occurred simultaneously with racist surveillance by police, as blacks participated in countercultures that partially validated their presence yet also exposed them to heightened levels of animosity from reactionary whites, who wanted to reassert the segregated urban boundaries that African American bohemians so visibly challenged. Therefore, as African American painter Arthur Monroe discerned, black bohemians, including Kaufman as well as Ted Joans, LeRoi Jones and James Baldwin in Greenwich Village, utilized fiercely independent and assertive personalities as a means to survive: when confronting whites like Bigarani, Kaufman "didn't *give* a fuck about who you thought you were, because he knew *what* you were."[101] Black artists and writers recognized that they were the focal point of attention from whites, including other bohemians and police, and they often used this to defy the racist intimidation of people like Bigarani.

Singling out certain individuals for repeated harassment led bohemians to develop informal networks of support. Collecting bail money for Kaufman was a key example. Kamstra recalled that "A lot of the local hip establishments had weekly bail money set aside for Bob Kaufman."[102] Another bohemian remembered that "wherever you went there was a 'Bob Kaufman Can' by the door that you put your nickels and dimes and

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[101]Personal interview with Arthur Monroe.

[102]Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them*, chap. 4 pp. 43-44.

quarters in because Bob was constantly in jail and you were constantly bailing him out."[103] Aware that the police targeted Kaufman directly and that the poet openly defied the much despised Bigarani, other bohemians felt obligated to donate money to secure his release from jail. Yet simply attaining bail money was not always sufficient. As one bohemian recalled, police "iceboxed" Kaufman after he urinated on Bigarani, meaning that "they'd put him in long enough in one place and you'd go down there with your money to get him out and they'd hustle him off to some other place, and they put him in jails all over the city and keep him circulating until finally you could get into the system far enough to get him back out."[104] Such measures demonstrated both the intense hatred that police harbored for belligerent poets and the difficulty that bohemians encountered in trying to protect comrades who insisted on provoking the police.

Bohemians also utilized neighborhood associations to counter police intimidation. The Bread and Wine Mission of Pierre Delattre played a crucial role in this effort. In early 1959, bohemians formed the North Beach Citizens Committee under the direction of Delattre, and within two months the organization had 150 members.[105] The committee sought "anything legal to counter the harassment," and one member bluntly observed that "Our job will be to protect our group from the police."[106] A key concern was to educate

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[103]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 13.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 165-166; Willoughby, "Charge Harassment by Cops."

[106]Ibid.

bohemians regarding how to behave in face-to-face confrontations with police, in order both to minimize the possibility of arrest and ensure that civil liberties were protected when arrests occurred. The committee mimeographed two pamphlets for distribution, "What To Do When Arrested" and a "Report Sheet" for individuals who witnessed harassment.[107] Delattre became involved in such efforts reluctantly, noting that "I waited a long time, until I was absolutely sure, before I said or did anything," but he insisted that claims of pervasive police misconduct were "true. I've seen it myself." In contrast to the provocative stance of Kaufman, Delattre was far more cautious, noting that "We're not out to get the police, just encourage proper law enforcement." Explaining the role of his ministry in fighting police harassment, Delattre noted that "One of the aims of the mission is to meet immediate crises in the lives of the community, whether spiritual or social. This is such a crisis."[108] Thus the Bread and Wine Mission provided an institutional basis not merely for poetry readings and art exhibits but also for political activism among North Beach bohemians. Moreover, the measured influence of Delattre provided an important counterweight to more confrontational individuals who often exacerbated tensions with police.

Another strategy bohemians employed to fight intimidation was to work with the American Civil Liberties Union and challenge the legality of police actions. When Bigarani removed the anti-police poems from the Bagel Shop window, bohemians met

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[107]Rigney and Smith, *Real Bohemia*, 165-166.

[108]Willoughby, "Charge Harassment by Cops."

that same day to discuss the matter with ACLU attorneys (including Lawrence Speiser, who previously represented City Lights Books in the *Howl* obscenity trial).[109] One ACLU lawyer concluded that removing the poems was "a clear violation of freedom of speech," while Speiser advised bohemians to post their work throughout North Beach, and later that night new editions of poetry were displayed in the Bagel Shop and City Lights.[110] Similarly, an attorney representing Hoppe charged that patrolmen used "storm trooper" tactics when harassing customers and employees of the Bagel Shop, but an investigation by the police department concluded that no misconduct occurred, and chief Ahern indignantly responded that his officers would "continue to do our regular police work."[111] In contrast to the much celebrated success of City Lights against obscenity charges, bar and café owners faced a far more difficult challenge in fighting police, who claimed that official investigations vindicated their actions and that morally questionable beatniks necessitated a greater presence in the district. Nonetheless, the ACLU played an important role in encouraging intellectuals in North Beach to protest civil liberties violations and to continue displaying their poetry in coffeehouses and bookstores.

In January 1960, approximately 300 bohemians rallied at Washington Square Park in North Beach to protest police misconduct during marijuana raids that occurred the

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[109]"Pair Seek Ban on Book Sale Charge," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 June 1957, City Lights Books Records, carton 4, fifth folder labeled "Howl Trial–clippings and miscellaneous items," Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

[110]Hoppe, "Lawman Rips Poems."

[111]"Ahern Denies 'Going After' Bagel Shop."

previous week.[112] Kamstra told the crowd that police ripped paintings from the wall of one apartment and called the residents "filthy communists," and he asserted that police targeted interracial couples for harassment.[113] Kaufman accused undercover narcotics agents of entering his home under false pretenses, and bitterly observed that "I get about two percent" of American democracy.[114] Another speaker called the police "an instrument of repression and terror against individuals who do not adhere to their social beliefs, their political beliefs."[115] Yet some speakers argued that bohemians themselves needed to develop more effective ways of countering police intimidation. Chester Anderson, editor of the little magazine *Underhound*, believed that "We have no civil rights because we haven't exercised them," and told the crowd, "If you are falsely arrested, say so, and sue. If you are roughed up by the police, say so, and sue. Don't cover up. Fight back in every legal way."[116] For Anderson, harassment occurred in part because bohemians had not spoken out and used the legal system to their full advantage. Moreover, Anderson asserted that bohemians aggravated tensions with police by harassing tourists, and he admonished the protesters to "Stop antagonizing tourists" and

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[112]"Big Beatnik Rally to Protest Raids," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 31 January 1960, sec. 1, p. 1, 5.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Ibid.

[115]June Muller, "Beatniks Seek Civil Rights," *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 January 1960, sec. 1, p. 10.

[116]"Big Beatnik Rally," p. 1, 5.

"Stop performing for them."[117] Anderson recognized the link between the growing popularity of North Beach as a tourist destination and increasing police surveillance, and thus he challenged bohemians to quit behaving in ways that gave police an excuse to engage in harassment. Finally, Anderson observed that "We can't change the fact that we are beat–the only thing we can do is make it an honorable word, like bohemian used to be."[118] Although many writers and artists renounced the beat label as a media stereotype, Anderson used it to channel the sense of community among bohemians in North Beach into less confrontational ways of countering police misconduct. For Anderson, bohemians themselves were partly to blame for the hostility they encountered, and improving public perceptions of the beat generation would help decrease tensions with police.

In addition to fighting police harassment, North Beach bohemians also protested Cold War anti-Communism. In May 1960, the House Un-American Activities Committee convened at the San Francisco city hall to investigate Communist subversion in the Bay Area. When 100 Berkeley students gathered in the rotunda to protest their exclusion from the hearings, police used fire hoses to force them down the stairs, where they were immediately arrested by other officers.[119] The following day, thousands of people gathered outside city hall to protest both HUAC and police brutality against

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[117]Ibid.

[118]Ibid.

[119]W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 16.

protesters. The crowd chanted "Seig Heil" and "Washington beatniks go home." Police closed city hall to the public, but Kamstra tried to enter the building anyway, at which point he was tackled by six policemen and arrested for inciting a riot.[120] Kamstra was willing to incur physical assault from police in order to demonstrate his opposition to HUAC, indicating that the political activism of some bohemians went beyond North Beach and included engagement in issues of growing concern to activists throughout the U.S. in the early 1960s.

North Beach artists and writers often differed in their responses to contemporary political issues, and their attitudes toward John F. Kennedy were a case in point, as some loathed his foreign policy while others believed that he would advance the rights of minorities. During the Cuban missile crisis, poet Philip Whalen concluded that "The President of the United States has for all practical purposes declared war on the Cubans, the Soviet Union, and very nearly all the rest of the world as well."[121] Despite this opposition to nuclear brinksmanship, some North Beach bohemians were tremendously discouraged by the Kennedy assassination, few more so than Bob Kaufman, who undertook a 12 year vow of silence upon learning of the killing.[122] Kaufman met

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[120]"5000 Gather at City Hall for Red Hearing Protest," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 May 1960, sec. 1, p. 1, 4-5.

[121]Philip Whalen, Journal, 21 May 1962 to 6 January 1963, Box 1, folder 3, Philip Whalen Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

[122]Steve Abbott, "Hidden Master of the Beats," *Poetry Flash* 157 (April 1986), reprinted in Tony Seymour, ed., *No Gods to Guide, No Herds to Follow: Bob Kaufman's "Street-Bop-Zen!"* (no publisher or place, 1986), n. p.

Kennedy during a campaign stop in San Francisco and, as a friend noted, "felt that there was real hope with someone like Kennedy in the White House."[123] His wife Eileen recalled that Bob saw the shooting on television and "just went to pieces. After that happened he didn't speak in any lengthy sentences or anything," and "he really never started to elucidate until the Vietnam War ended."[124] Shocked at the death of a leader he believed would assist the African American civil rights struggle, the voice of one of the most admired poets in North Beach fell silent.[125] In part, this merely reflected the psychological idiosyncrasies of eccentric intellectuals. Yet is also revealed the extent to which many bohemians remained intensely concerned with and affected by contemporary political events in the decades after World War II.

The Political Mobilization of Bohemians in Los Angeles

As in North Beach, political activism among bohemians in Los Angeles often focused on defending access to public space. In Venice, this struggle centered largely on one coffeehouse. The Gas House was both an important gathering place for artists and writers and the chief target of conservative Venetians who wanted to rid the district of beatniks. Thus, the Gas House had both symbolic and practical significance for Venice bohemians, and ensuring its survival was a focal point of their fight against harassment.

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[123]Qtd. in Nicosia, ed., *Cranial Guitar*, 16.

[124]Ibid.

[125]Seymour, "Don't Forget Bob Kaufman."

To meet this goal, artists and writers allied with civil liberties groups, spoke out during public meetings of the Los Angeles police commission, and held rallies and protests. Lawrence Lipton, whose book *The Holy Barbarians* played a central role in making L.A. beats nationally known, spearheaded much of this effort and always sought to exploit media attention to champion the Venice counterculture. Furthermore, some Los Angeles bohemians moved beyond opposition to police misconduct and worked in a wide array of progressive political causes.

Artists and writers in Venice realized that they had to counter negative stereotypes of beatniks as indolent loafers and dangerous criminals, and to do so they undertook a campaign to beautify the district.[126] Artists painted abstract illustrations on garbage cans in alleys throughout the area, hoping to demonstrate that their creative talent could benefit the entire community. They also offered to paint garbage cans that residents brought to the Gas House, either for free or for a small payment.[127] Lipton, never hesitant to exaggerate on behalf of bohemia, claimed that "the beatniks are beautifying Venice. If they are given a chance to apply the skills of modern art to the Venice shacks and tumbledown property they can be saved from condemnation and make Venice the

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[126]For an analysis of how Venice artists worked outside mainstream galleries and museums to create an alternative civic culture, see Sarah L. Schrank, "Art and the City: The Transformation of Civic Culture in Los Angeles, 1900-1965" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at San Diego, 2002), chap. 4.

[127]"Bam; Roll on with Bam!" *Time*, 14 September 1959, 28; "Beatniks Organize: Offer to Paint West Venice Garbage Cans," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1959, no sec., n. p., "Youth 1959" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

showcase of the world."[128] While decorating a few garbage cans and alleys did little to alter the aesthetic appearance of an economically depressed district, it did reflect an awareness among writers and artists that creating a more positive public image of the beat generation was crucial if the district was to remain a viable bohemian colony.

Artists and writers also tried to rally their supporters in Venice and throughout Los Angeles, using the Gas House itself as their headquarters. When Roberts and the Civic Union began their smear campaign, bohemians held a special poetry reading at the coffeehouse to denounce their opponents.[129] The police commission ruled that no poems could be read at the event because the venue lacked an entertainment license, but Lipton shrewdly taped himself reading one of his own works and then played it at the café before an audience of over 200 people.[130] His poem, entitled "A Funky Blues for All Squares, Creeps and Cornballs," ridiculed people who "bug themselves with their own advertising slogans" and "seem to be atoning everlastingly / For some nameless long-forgotten crime."[131] While not among the finest examples of literary craftsmanship in L.A., the poem articulated a widely shared belief among bohemians that prude and reactionary Venetians seemed obsessed with imposing their values on everyone in the district. On

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[128]"Venice Landlords Fight Beatnik Art Clubhouse."

[129]"Beatniks Slate Show for Venice Squares, Cornballs," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 1 August 1959, no sec., n. p., "Lawrence Lipton" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[130]Patrick McNulty, "Beatniks and Venice Square Off in Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 1959, sec. 1, p. 2, 8.

[131]Lawrence Lipton, *Bruno in Venice West and Other Poems* (Van Nuys, CA: Venice West Publishers, 1976), 88.

another occasion, the Gas House held an open house to galvanize supporters, and 2,000 people came to Venice but were denied entry to the coffeehouse by police, again on the grounds that a permit was needed.[132] Yet the fact that so many people turned out demonstrated that writers and artists in Venice were not the only people in L.A. who supported the Gas House. Despite efforts by the police to make the Gas House off-limits to the public, bohemians effectively used it as both a meeting place and a means to attract supporters from throughout Los Angeles.

Nonetheless, Venice bohemians realized that they had to fight their opponents more directly if the Gas House was to survive, and in this effort they gained the support of crucial allies. Most important was A. L. Wirin, the attorney who represented the coffeehouse.[133] As chief legal counsel for the southern California branch of the ACLU, Wirin previously defended labor activist Harry Bridges and Japanese Americans who faced internment during World War II, as well as filing one of the first test cases against loyalty oaths with the U.S. Supreme Court.[134] Bohemians in Venice also secured the endorsement of the Pacific Park Democratic Club and acquired signatures from over 2,000 Angelenos who supported the Gas House, including composer Igor Stravinksy and writer Christopher Isherwood.[135] Thus Venice bohemians gained the assistance of one of

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[132]"California: Heat on the Beatniks," *Newsweek*, 17 August 1959, 36.

[133]Hulse, "Wine, Nude Models."

[134]"The Al Wirin Story," *Open Forum*, July 1956, 3, "Al Wirin" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[135]"Beatnik Hearing Becomes Fuzzy."

the most dedicated civil liberties attorneys on the West Coast and substantial public support for their efforts, including endorsements from prominent intellectuals in L.A.

When the police commission held hearings to determine if the Gas House would receive an entertainment permit, bohemians came out in force to voice their support for the coffeehouse. In particular, they emphasized that artists and writers in Venice merely sought to display their work and exchange ideas in a supportive and stimulating intellectual environment. Owner Al Matthews testified that "the premises are being used for the free expression of talented artists in the peaceful pursuit of happiness."[136] Similarly, Lipton highlighted the dedication of Venetian poets and painters who "worship the arts, looking to them rather than to politicians, preachers or pedants."[137] Yet bohemians did not rely on testimony before the police commission but instead seized the opportunity both to showcase their creative talents and publicly assert the benefits of unconventional ideas. Eric Nord, manager of the Gas House, asked a reporter to "Think of the good that could be brought with bongo drums pounding out a message of peace" to counter the "beep-beep-beep of inter-stellar hardware."[138] Folksinger Julie Meredith strolled through the police auditorium during hearing intermissions, singing a song written especially for the occasion about squares who hate every beatnik "because he's

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[136]Hulse, "Wine, Nude Models."

[137]"Beatniks 'Cut Out' of Hearing."

[138]Hulse, "Wine, Nude Models."

different from us."[139] Furthermore, artists set up an exhibit outside the auditorium that included paintings, a wide array of assemblage pieces and a newly decorated garbage can.[140] As with the beautification campaign, bohemians wanted to demonstrate both to the police commission and the general public that countercultural life in Venice was about creative self-expression through painting, poetry and music. Aware that the local media devoted substantial coverage to the hearings, artists and writers used such publicity to present a positive image of bohemianism.

Yet the controversy surrounding the Gas House centered not merely on noisy bongo drums or all-night carousing but more importantly on fears that bohemians threatened the moral fiber of Venice. These concerns often focused on homosexuality and racial intermixing, and thus bohemians used the hearings to counter stereotypes about beatnik immorality and defend their tolerance for unconventional ways of thinking and living. Thomas Mulherin, the officer who oversaw the hearings, questioned whether Lipton understood the "meaning of morality" or was a "responsible" person.[141] Because Lipton was so visible as a spokesman and representative of the Gas House, questioning his character was a way of challenging the morality of all artists and writers in Venice, and he countered that bohemians simply wanted "to live by their own standards as long as

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[139]"Bongos Soul Soothing, Beatnik Hearing Told."

[140]Ibid.

[141]Jerry Hulse, "Beatniks Square Off as Gas House Gasser Adjourns on a 'Moral' Kick," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1959, sec. 1, p. 5.

they do not violate the law."[142] Similarly, Matthews asserted that "There is not a human being I would bar from the Gas House if he conducted himself all right when he came in and continued to do so while he was there. If I am granted this permit, I intend to operate the Gas House on that same principle."[143] He also noted that "At the Gas House, our first house rule is 'Thou shalt not bug [disturb] thy neighbor'" and insisted that "I'm not going to regulate people's mores."[144] While neither Lipton nor Matthews mentioned homosexuality overtly, their portrayal of Gas House habitues who lived by their own standards and refused to impose their beliefs on others implicitly affirmed the extent to which bohemian unconventionality encompassed a tolerance for homosexuals. The point was indirect but nonetheless crucial, for as both men recognized, the real issue before the police commission was not the personal conduct of a few eccentrics but rather the integrity of bohemianism in Los Angeles, as it was so potently symbolized by Venice and the Gas House. Furthermore, racial intermixing at the coffeehouse was a divisive issue during the hearings. Matthews told the police commission that Venice bohemians "have three dirty words: race, creed and color," and Lipton testified that "There are those who have criticized [the] Gas House openly on the street and on our premises for permitting

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[142]"Beatniks 'Cut Out' of Hearing."

[143]"Beatniks Described as 'New Religion,'" *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*, 3 September 1959, no sec., n. p., "Beatniks" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

[144]"Bongos Soul Soothing" and "Bam; Roll on with Bam!" (brackets in original).

black and white people to associate together."[145] Hearing examiner Mulherin responded indignantly that Gas House supporters were exploiting the issue of race and asserted that "the only purpose you are using it, as I see it, is to make either the whites or blacks object to it; trying to pit race against race."[146] Yet as Wirin noted, the police first invoked race by submitting into evidence a letter from a Venice resident who complained that blacks and whites frequently intermingled on the premises.[147] Essentially, the police commission tried simultaneously to make racial intermixing a pretext for denying a permit and to blame the applicants for using race as a divisive issue, indicating the extent to which the LAPD wanted to avoid appearing racist in its effort to prohibit whites and blacks from intermingling at the Gas House. Moreover, bohemians used the hearings to highlight both their challenge to racial segregation in Venice and the anger that this aroused among racist whites in the district.

The perceived immorality of bohemian countercultures was a central factor in the refusal of the police commission to issue an entertainment permit. Although the commission noted that the L.A. Department of Building and Public Safety denied a certificate of occupancy to the deteriorated structure, it emphasized that "the so-called 'beatniks,' including Eric Nord and Lawrence Lipton, are of bad moral character, and that

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[145]"Bam; Roll on with Bam!" and letter from A. L. Wirin to Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, 8 October 1959.

[146]Letter from Wirin to L.A. Police Commissioners, 8 October 1959.

[147]Ibid. Neither local nor national media coverage of the Gas House noted the divisive role that race played during the hearings.

such 'beatniks' [are] an intimate part of the proposed café entertainment."[148] Ironically, the commission alluded to a key characteristic of bohemian countercultures: the extent to which eccentric artists and writers functioned as "café entertainment" for middle-class tourists on slumming expeditions. Moreover, in highlighting the "bad moral character" of beatniks, the commission demonstrated that one of its key goals was to regulate morality in Los Angeles, which meant depriving Venice bohemians of public gathering places.

Although it lacked an entertainment permit, the Gas House operated sporadically for over two years in a war of attrition against urban renewal in Venice. After the commission issued its ruling in December 1959, the Gas House assumed various incarnations as a coffeehouse, an art gallery, a community center with art classes for children and adults, and a private residence.[149] During this time police tried to close it down, and in 1961 a municipal court found Nord guilty of holding poetry readings and jazz performances without an entertainment permit (he was sentenced to one year of probation).[150] The following year, the Department of Building and Safety ruled that the

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[148]Minutes of the Board of Police Commissioners, 30 December 1959, volume for 1 July 1959 to 29 June 1960, p. 191, Los Angeles City Archives.

[149]James Peck, "The Scene," *Los Angles Examiner*, 27 November 1960, no sec., n. p., "Eric Nord" envelope, and "Beatnik Den Now Lures Cultureniks," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 21 April 1960, no sec., n. p., "Beatniks" envelope, both from *Examiner* Collection, USC; "Famed Beatnik Landmark May Be Torn Down," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1962, West Side section, p. 1.

[150]"Big Daddy Nord on Probation," *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*, 17 February 1961, "Eric Nord" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC.

premises were unfit for any use and ordered the building repaired or demolished.[151] Edward D. Higgins, who owned the building and had leased it to Matthews, accused city officials of exaggerating the extent of deterioration and argued that the structure could easily be brought up to code.[152] Similarly, William Garret, the new manager of the coffeehouse, planned what he called a "vivid demonstration" at hearings before city officials to prove that the Gas House was fit for occupancy.[153] Yet by this point the coffeehouse was at the center of battles over urban renewal in Venice. In 1958, oil companies that owned unprofitable wells in the district announced plans for a major redevelopment initiative that included apartments, single-family dwellings and a hotel, and by 1962 L.A. leaders sponsored a proposal to demolish old buildings in the area.[154] Civic groups opposed to urban renewal, such as the Venice Canal Improvement Association, supported the preservation of the Gas House as a means to block further demolition in the district.[155] Yet city officials refused to relent in their strict enforcement of building codes, and Higgins concluded that the cost of bringing the 57 year-old

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[151]"Gas House in Venice Faces Demolition Order," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 1962, West Side section, p. 1, 11.

[152]"Venice Gas House Under City's Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1962, sec. 2, p. 1.

[153]Don Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads,' Tourist Novelty Gone," *Los Angeles Times* 15 April 1962, sec. G, p. 5.

[154]"Oilmen Study Modernizing of Venice Area," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1958, no sec., n. p., "Venice, CA" envelope, *Examiner* Collection, USC; Don Neff, "Few Beatniks Develop Some Real Art Talents," *Los Angeles Times* 17 April 1962, sec. 2, p. 8.

[155]"Venice Gas House Under City's Fire."

structure up to stringent regulations was too high.[156] The coffeehouse was torn down in September 1962.[157] Before the demolition, over 100 bohemians gathered at the building for a "wake" that celebrated the Gas House and mourned its passing.[158] Although Garret insisted that "the Gas House is going to live again," he also noted that some poets and painters planned to go to Mexico and "seek artistic asylum because of harassment."[159] Thus for some intellectuals, the destruction of the Gas House represented the end of Venice as a viable artistic colony.

If campaigns to destroy bohemian public space in Venice encouraged some artists and writers to leave the district, it galvanized others to become more active in fighting police harassment. This was especially true of John Haag, who began frequenting the Venice West Café in 1959 and noticed that "practically every night the cops were picking on somebody, outside or inside, whatever. And I got real tired of it." He organized a picket line that marched up and down the boardwalk, carrying signs denouncing police intimidation.[160] He also established the Venice Forum, a group that sought to counter the Civic Union and develop a dialogue with the leadership of the LAPD regarding police

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[156]"Gas House in Venice Faces Demolition Order."

[157]"Venice Beatnik Haven Falls to Wreckers," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 September 1962, sec. 1, p. 2.

[158]"Gas House Passes on with Bongo Beat," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1962, sec. 1, p. 2.

[159]Ibid.

[160]Personal interview with John Haag.

misconduct.[161] However, because Haag was vocal in his opposition to the intimidation of coffeehouse customers, police targeted him personally. On one occasion, before he bought the café, police demanded to know where he worked, but he refused to answer until he spoke with an attorney, at which point he was taken in for fingerprinting and a background check by the FBI, which resulted in the loss of his security clearance and hence his job as a technical writer at an aerospace firm. After purchasing the coffeehouse, Haag became increasingly vocal in his opposition to the police. He frequently complained to the police department regarding patrolmen in Venice, but the intimidation continued unabated.[162] Like Nord at the Gas House, Haag was arrested for holding poetry readings without an entertainment permit, and in response he organized "Poetry for Freedom" events at the café to protest continued police intimidation.[163] When the L.A. City Council proposed the ordinance against bongo drums in Venice in 1965, Haag spearheaded opposition to the measure. At one council meeting, he argued that "The vast majority of us only want to live in peace with our neighbors. This is a movement to drive the bohemian community out of Venice." He also observed that the only "offense" of bohemians was that "they don't look or act like other people. They mean no harm."[164] The council passed the ordinance, but Haag insisted that "This is not

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[161]Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads.'"

[162]Personal interview with John Haag.

[163]Stuart Perkoff, journal no. 42, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[164]Smith, "Beach Bongo Ban Fails," p. 1, 10.

the end of us. It's only the beginning!"[165]

To a significant extent, he was correct: many L.A. bohemians in the early and mid 1960s developed an overtly political consciousness, often through the contacts they made within the countercultural milieu. Until Haag experienced persistent intimidation from the police, he was "your typical liberal," assuming that if he provided evidence of misconduct to the police department, the harassment would end. The fact that it did not catalyzed "the start of my radicalization."[166] Another contributing factor was that his coffeehouse, while not a "lefty hangout" per se, nonetheless "had representation from just about every leftist group in town," including members of the Socialist and Communist Parties who "showed up every so often."[167] Haag did not think that such politicos came specifically to convert customers to their causes but rather, like so many other habitues, sought "self-expression," particularly a forum in which to "talk their line."[168] Yet by 1964, his ongoing skirmishes with the police made him increasingly skeptical of all government actions, as did knowledge that his leftist clientele provided regarding the Vietnam War, and "in a way, I got converted."[169] This conversion was not to the Communist or Socialist Parties, both of which struck him as too hierarchical, but rather to

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[165]Smith, "Bohemians Make City Hall Scene," sec. 2, p. 1.

[166]Personal interview with John Haag.

[167]Ibid.

[168]Ibid.

[169]Ibid.

working with left wing organizations to build support for the antiwar movement.[170] Thus the growing commitment Haag felt as a peace activist was closely linked to the bohemian atmosphere of the Venice West Café, which included not only poetry readings but also political discussions regarding American foreign policy in southeast Asia. The path whereby Haag became active in the peace movement demonstrated that bohemian countercultures could play a central role in leading people to political engagement.

For some bohemians, this growing politicization was an unwelcome departure from artistic creativity and introspective discovery. This was especially true among poets and painters in Venice, many of whom regarded the enclave primarily as an intellectual colony and an environment conducive to self-examination. When bohemians organized the Venice Forum to coordinate effective responses to police harassment, one man attended a meeting only to announce that "I'm an individual. I don't believe in organization!"[171] Shortly before he sold the Venice West Café in 1962, John Kenevan complained that "there are too many people here now who believe in politics, which is a trivial study compared to the study of one's self"[172] For those who prided themselves on disengagement from society, organized political work seemed like an absurd departure from more important questions of self-awareness and psychological understanding. In 1964, Stuart Perkoff went to the Venice West Café and discovered that "people are

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[170]Ibid.

[171]Neff, "Beatniks Stay in 'Pads,'" p. 5.

[172]Ibid.

talking about Goldwater and that sort of thing."[173] "John Haag just talked to me about politics!" he exclaimed in his journal, "of all things."[174] Yet his rejection of activism came after years of commitment to socialism. The politicization of many Venice bohemians reminded Perkoff of his "olden days of change-the-worldism," when "I made an attempt to convince myself that the S.P. [Socialist Party] was a valid place for me–ha!"[175] By the mid 1960s, he could "cheer and approve" the growing activism of young people and admire the generational "continuity" of his pre-adolescent son participating in antiwar marches, but he no longer felt personally committed to political activism.[176]

Venice was not the only bohemian enclave in Los Angeles that became more politicized in the early 1960s, as many habitues of the district near L.A. City College also became more politically conscious and active. Lionel Rolfe believed that the coffeehouses near LACC were always "a lot more political" than those in Venice, and noted that "There were a lot of CP members in coffeehouses, especially the Xanadu," including Party members who came to seek converts and argue with other habitues about democratic socialism. This ideologically eclectic clientele meant that "the Xanadu

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[173]Perkoff, journal no. 42, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

[174]Ibid.

[175]Ibid.

[176]Perkoff, journal nos. 26, and 32, Perkoff Papers, UCLA.

reveled in politics," which "was as welcome a subject as chess or literature or music."[177] Moreover, contemporary political issues altered the bohemian counterculture of Los Angeles. As Rolfe concluded, "what had been a primarily spiritual and cultural protest became political," and as the civil rights movement gained momentum, "the Xanadu looked more and more like a way station for activists going south."[178] Similarly, Levi Kingston, the owner of Pogo's Swamp, noted that since the early 1960s "there was a *lot* of interaction with people into the art and people in the civil rights thing" at his coffeehouse.[179] For example, African American activists such as Maulana Karenga (then known as Ron Everett), later a prominent member of the Black Arts movement, often hung out at the Xanadu and Pogo's (he and Rolfe were roommates while both attended LACC).[180] Furthermore, Kingston believed that while leftists in New York were very sectarian, in Los Angeles, Communists, Trotskyists and other radicals interacted both in civil rights initiatives and in the bohemian counterculture of the city.[181] In sum,

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[177]Personal interview with Lionel Rolfe, 9 August 2001; Rolfe, "The Great Coffee Houses of Los Angeles: Where the Beat Went On," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 21 October 1979, *California Living* sec., p. 27.

[178]Lionel Rolfe, *In Search of . . . Literary L.A.* (Los Angeles: California Classics Books, 1991), 164; Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 25.

[179]Personal interview with Levi Kingston, 14 June 2002, emphasis Kingston's.

[180]Idid.; Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 25.

[181]Kingston recalled that when he went to New York, radical politics there was "much more *sectarian*" (emphasis Kingston's). Similarly, Rorabaugh notes that Bay Area Communists were more willing to ally with other leftist and liberal groups, and to criticize Soviet foreign policy, than their New York counterparts; see *Berkeley at War*, 88-89.

countercultural enclaves in Los Angeles facilitated intermingling among avant-garde intellectuals and political activists, who often gravitated to the same public spaces.

This intermixing led not only to heated coffeehouse debates but also to direct action. Kingston was a conscientious objector and very active in the antiwar movement, as well as the Black Congress, an organization that included the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, and the US group led by Karenga.[182] For the white photographer Charles Brittin, the galvanizing political issue was civil rights. In the early 1960s, he felt "compelled to do something because the times demanded it." He worked with CORE in Los Angeles, and in 1965 spent three months doing organizational work in Louisiana and Mississippi, at which point he concluded that nonviolent resistance was "increasingly ineffective" and became active with the Black Panthers. Civil rights activism affected Brittin both artistically and politically, as his early work in CORE led to "taking photographs of a kind I'd never taken before," and his years as an activist enabled him "to do something more rather than less valuable" to improve race relations.[183] For John Haag, civil rights and especially the antiwar movement were key concerns. Beginning in 1964, Haag served as L.A. area chairman for the W. E. B. Du Bois Club, a youth organization and a front group for the Communist Party.[184] The Du Bois Club

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[182]Personal interview with Levi Kingston.

[183]Kristine McKenna, "Way Out West: A Conversation with Charles Brittin," in *Charles Brittin* (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1999), 16-17.

[184]Personal interview with John Haag. On the Du Bois Clubs, see Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 156, and Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 88.

appealed to him because at the time, "they were one of the few groups around that was opposed to the War" in Vietnam. For Haag, the issue was not socialism, communism or any other ideology, but rather working through political organizations to end the Vietnam War, and in Los Angeles during the mid 1960s, this often meant working with the Communist Party. As Haag recalled, "It didn't bother me to work with Communists, but I didn't want to be part of the gang." The year Haag joined the Du Bois Clubs, the organization sponsored a public demonstration against the war at the Veterans' Cemetery on Wilshire Boulevard. The turnout was a mere 30 or so people, but Haag noted that it was the first "visible protest in Los Angeles, and things built rather rapidly" afterwards.[185] Among Venice bohemians who were politically active, Haag may hold the record for the breadth of participation: he founded the Venice chapter of the ACLU, worked as publicity chairman of the Venice/Santa Monica chapter of CORE, served as Westside head of the Ad Hoc Committee to End Police Malpractice, and was co-chairman of both the Los Angeles Committee to End the War in Vietnam and the Freedom Now Committee.[186] Beginning in the later 1960s, he helped found the Peace and Freedom Party of California and worked with that organization for decades.[187]

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[185]Personal interview with John Haag. Haag stopped working with the Du Bois Club after the group changed its slogan from "Withdrawal Now" to "Negotiation Now" in order to win support of liberal groups and avoid being labeled as a radical organization.

[186]Personal interview with John Haag; Maynard, *Venice West*, 162-163. Maynard notes that Haag was an "incomparable joiner" but does not assess the politicization of Venice bohemians in substantial length.

[187]Personal interview with John Haag.

Conclusion

Overall, bohemians in Los Angeles and San Francisco met with limited success in their efforts to fight police harassment. In both North Beach and Venice, anti-intellectualism, homophobia and racism all led police, municipal governments and conservative civic groups to target bohemians as moral degenerates who threatened local communities. The inexorable march of urban renewal in Los Angeles and the long established sensitivity to protecting tourism in San Francisco meant that bohemians in both cities confronted campaigns to eliminate public spaces where writers, artists, musicians, and their eccentric hangers-on congregated. Significantly, opposition to avant-garde intellectuals centered not merely on the art and literature that they produced but moreover on the countercultures to which they belonged, in particular the validation of racial intermixing and homosexuality in bars and coffeehouses: the issue was not merely obscene poems or paintings but more importantly the immoral conduct that avant-garde intellectuals seemed not only to tolerate but encourage. Faced with such a threat, municipal governments used the regulation of liquor licenses and entertainment permits as a highly effective means to enforce values that were not only philistine but also homophobic and racist. Furthermore, the fiercely independent and eccentric individuals who gathered in bohemian enclaves were often ill suited for sustained and disciplined political activism, provoking police harassment rather than seeking effective means to fight it and valuing self-contemplation over social engagement.

Yet the political mobilization of bohemian countercultures was significant. In the

late 1950s and early 1960s, when growing numbers of activists opposed anti-Communist witch hunts, when blacks and whites fought for African American civil rights, and when the Vietnam War very gradually emerged as an issue among some leftists, avant-garde poets, painters, and musicians mounted a formidable counter-offensive against the harassment of bohemian countercultures. In allying with civil liberties groups, forming their own neighborhood associations, and holding public protests, bohemians succeeded in drawing publicity to their cause and utilizing their limited individual resources for collective purposes. Furthermore, for some bohemians, fighting police intimidation catalyzed more sustained participation in the civil rights and antiwar movements. In all of these efforts, bohemians demonstrated that they were not the passive and apathetic posers so often stereotyped by the mass media. Bohemians were at the center of both the growing dissatisfaction with conformity that intellectuals articulated in the 1950s and the political consciousness that activists enacted in the 1960s.

Conclusion

A key characteristic of American bohemianism is its connection to particular urban districts, and by the mid 1960s older bohemian enclaves in America existed alongside newer centers of countercultural activity. In Los Angeles, Venice remained an environment that spawned idiosyncrasy, and when the writer Harold Norse moved to the district in the late 1960s, he was struck by the mixture of "junkies, winos, hippies, Jesus freaks, and body builders" who lived there.[1] Yet American countercultures underwent both geographical and generational changes, and L.A. coffeehouses served as a link between older bohemians who came of age during the Depression and World War II and younger participants in the hippie movement and the New Left. After the Xanadu closed in 1963, many of its habitues began frequenting the Fifth Estate on the Sunset Strip.[2] Al Mitchell, the owner of the Fifth Estate, had planned a newsletter for his customers, and in 1964 he let Art Kunkin use a downstairs room to publish the *Los Angeles Free Press*, one of the first underground newspapers in America associated with hippies and New Leftists.[3] The writer Lionel Rolfe was among the Xanadu regulars who migrated to the Fifth Estate, and he believed that the *Free Press* "grew out of the coffee house movement," as Kunkin and many early contributors to the publication were all denizens

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[1]Harold Norse, *Memoirs of a Bastard Angel: A Fifty-Year Literary and Erotic Odyssey* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989), 416.

[2]Lionel Rolfe, "The Great Coffee Houses of Los Angeles: Where the Beat Went On," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 21 October 1979, *California Living* sec., p. 21.

[3]Ibid., and Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 22.

of the Xanadu and Fifth Estate. Kunkin disagreed, claiming that "there was a curious separation between the paper and the coffee house regulars."[4] Yet he also recalled that "I had been hanging around the coffee houses and the poetry groups, the small theaters and so forth, so I knew there was a whole life there," and "I wanted a paper that would draw together all the diverse elements in the community, and that would be not only political, but cultural as well."[5] Rolfe acknowledged that the *Free Press* emerged at a time when younger bohemians and politicos were becoming more visible, yet he insisted that "it was the coffee house crowd that created the milieu out of which the newspaper was born."[6] Significantly, both Rolfe and Kunkin were correct: bohemian public space provided the creative nucleus for an independent paper at a time when countercultural life in America experienced a generational shift, and in later years the *Free Press* attained a substantial readership among hippies and New Leftists in L.A. but also featured the work of older intellectuals such as Lawrence Lipton. Indeed, the migration of Xanadu habitues to the Fifth Estate was emblematic of a broader reorientation in the countercultural geography of Los Angeles, when the Sunset Strip emerged as a focal point of hippie life in the city.[7]

Similar changes occurred in San Francisco. In 1964, topless female dancing

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[4]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 21.

[5]Qtd. in Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 21.

[6]Rolfe, "Great Coffee Houses," 22.

[7]This occurred simultaneously with the growing recognition of Los Angeles as an important center of artistic creativity. See Sarah Schrank, "The Art of the City: Modernism, Censorship, and the Emergence of Los Angeles's Postwar Art Scene," *American Quarterly* 56 (September 2004): 683-691.

became a craze in North Beach nightclubs, and with the instant financial success of semi-nude dancing, landlords hiked rents and forced many small businesses to close.[8] At the same time, drug dealing and prostitution became more prevalent in the district. North Beach habitue Jerry Kamstra recalled bitterly that "Within three years every small restaurant, grocery store, salami factory and non-topless business had been run out by exorbitant rents, rip-off scams, and the half-time hoodlum characteristics that began to dominate the street," and one grocer claimed that his monthly rent rose from $125 to $450 overnight.[9] Thus many small business owners and residents were forced out, although the survival of venerable establishments like City Lights Books, the neighboring Vesuvio bar, and the Caffé Trieste helped North Beach retain its stature as a bohemian enclave. A year after the topless craze began, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that the Haight-Ashbury district was the "new refuge for Bohemians" in the city, and in later years the Haight was widely regarded as the national headquarters of the hippies.[10] As in Los Angeles, there were inter-generational ties among the bohemians of San Francisco. When thousands of hippies gathered in Golden Gate Park for the Human Be-In of 1967,

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[8]On the topless craze itself, see Bonnie Parker and Gary Smart, "Whatever Happened to Topless?" *San Francisco Business*, July 1968, 41-42, 44.

[9]Jerry Kamstra, *Stand Naked and Cool Them: North Beach and the Bohemian Dream, 1950-1980* (No place: Peer Amid Press, 1980), chap. 4, p. 50. See also Kenneth Rexroth, "Corruption in North Beach," *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 April 1965, sec. 2, p. 2.

[10]Michael Fallon, "Are 'Beats' Good Business?" *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 September 1965, no sec., n.p., "Rexroth, Kenneth--Personal Clippings Only" envelope, *San Francisco Examiner* News Clippings Morgue, San Francisco History Center.

beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder were on hand to provide Buddhist chants and mantras.[11] Moreover, many hippies regarded the beats as essential progenitors. Peter Berg, a playwright whose work was produced by the avant-garde San Francisco Mime Troupe, recalled that "When I read *Howl*, I knew I didn't have anything to lose. That's what did it. That's what sent people out in search of experience."[12] If such quests led people to different urban districts than in previous decades, the underlying motivation was the same: a desire to circumvent restrictive social norms in places where like-minded people lived and worked.

Another central feature of American bohemianism is the ubiquity of proclamations of its demise. Throughout the twentieth century, intellectuals announced the death of bohemia at precisely those moments when the influence of countercultural attitudes and ways of life was especially noticeable outside artistic and literary coteries. During the 1920s, New Yorkers often bemoaned the loss of Greenwich Village to uptown slummers. Floyd Dell, a mid-westerner who came to Manhattan in 1913 and co-edited the legendary political and cultural journal *The Masses*, recalled that by the late 1910s the extension of Seventh Avenue southward and the expansion of subway service meant that the Village was no longer "islanded amid the roaring tides of commerce," but rather became "a side-show for tourists, a peep-show for vulgarians, a commercial exhibit of

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[11]Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (1984, reprint: New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 124, 126-127.

[12]Leonard Wolf, ed., *Voices from the Love Generation* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), 250. On Berg's work in the Mime Troupe, see Perry, *Haight-Ashbury*, 89-90.

tawdry Bohemianism."[13] Malcolm Cowley attributed the ubiquity of such sentiments to the fact that the Village "became so popular that too many people insisted on living there," while bohemian "standards," including uninhibited self-expression and the autonomy of women, "had spread through the country" once advertisers utilized cultural rebellion as a marketing tool.[14] Yet such laments of tourist slumming and commercialization did not prevent succeeding generations from regarding the Village as the most exciting place on earth. "There seemed no other place where a right-thinking person might live," a young Lionel Trilling concluded in the 1920s (before he became one of the most influential literary critics in the nation), and twenty years later the actress Lucille Ball called the district "the greatest place in the world."[15] The hippie counterculture provided another opportunity for intellectuals to mourn the passing of bohemia. In the early 1970s, the social critic Michael Harrington concluded that "all of the middle-class verities" were "either in doubt or in shambles," and as "the bourgeoisie itself became decadent," bohemia was "deprived of the stifling atmosphere without which it could not breathe."[16] Like many intellectuals, Harrington and Dell valorized bohemia

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[13]Floyd Dell, *Love in Greenwich Village* (1926, reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 296.

[14]Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1951 ed., reprint, New York: Penguin, 1994), 65, 64.

[15]Qtd. in Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), ix.

[16]Michael Harrington, "We Few, We Happy Few, We Bohemians," *Esquire*, August 1972, 99.

first and foremost as a community of avant-garde creativity, and thus they regarded its popularization as the death knell of countercultural authenticity.

Artists and writers who dedicated their lives to creativity and sight-seeing tourists who sought to glimpse the latest fad constituted the polar extremes of bohemia. Significantly, both served essential functions. Avant-garde intellectuals were the source not only of poetry and painting but also of adversarial attitudes and ways of life, and tourists helped provide the economic support that made bars and cafes in bohemian districts financially viable enterprises. Obviously, the former group had good reason to loathe the latter. Writers and artists assumed that unconventional living and thinking, however enjoyable, were ultimately manifestations of the more fundamental desire to produce art, literature and ideas that were relevant both personally and socially. Yet tourists often mistook bizarrely attired aesthetes who drank excessively and loved freely for the whole of bohemia, and their concern with avant-garde creativity typically went no further than occasional and brief excursions to places like the Village and North Beach, or the purchase of a painting to shock their suburban neighbors. Moreover, the deleterious impact of urban gentrification on avant-garde intellectuals should not be underestimated, as aspiring poets and painters throughout the twentieth century found themselves repeatedly priced out of the make-shift working and living spaces in which they plied their crafts. Dell noted that by the late 1910s, "the beautiful crumbling houses of great rooms and high ceilings" in the Village were "ruthlessly torn down to make room for

modern apartment-buildings."[17] As Dell recognized, the commercialization of bohemian districts not only caused an influx of philistine pretenders but also made economic survival more difficult for aspiring writers and artists. Thus many intellectuals found no mid point between bonafide bohemians and slumming tourists.

A central theme of this study is that such a middle ground did exist and must be examined in order to understand the social and cultural significance of bohemianism. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, many of the new residents and frequent visitors who gravitated to North Beach and Venice did not identify as writers or artists, yet they often felt a genuine affinity for the adversarial attitudes and behavior that flourished in urban bohemias. Although such people did not aspire to produce great art or literature, they regarded bohemian enclaves as far more than a brief stop on a vacation itinerary or a fun way to spend Saturday night, as they shared with avant-garde intellectuals a desire to find viable alternatives to the conformity that seemed to plague postwar America. New residents and frequent visitors demonstrated that the adversarial culture of bohemians resonated far beyond artistic and literary cadres. For both avant-garde intellectuals and weekend visitors, bohemian enclaves constituted a "third space," defined by cultural theorist Homi Bhabha as a structure of "liminality" and "hybridity" that "opens up the possibility of articulating *different*, even incommensurable cultural practices and

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[17]Dell, *Love in Greenwich Village*, 296; see also Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams*, 342-343.

priorities."[18] The third spaces of bohemia were formed through both articulation and action: beat writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg articulated adversarial attitudes and ways of life, and new residents and frequent visitors gravitated to urban areas in which "incommensurable cultural practices and priorities" flourished. Of course, millions of Americans probably agreed with an advertising executive who bemoaned the "high tide of mediocrity" in the U.S. during the Eisenhower years.[19] Indeed, the popularity of books by William White, David Riesman, Vance Packard, Paul Goodman, Betty Friedan and other social critics suggested that other-directed organization men and suburban housewives were not always comfortable with the sacrifices they made to reap the fruits of affluence. What made bohemians different was that they acted on their dissatisfactions by seeking alternatives in urban districts where writers, artists and musicians congregated.

These districts were alluring because they challenged postwar social norms, including consumerism, homophobia, restrictive gender roles and racial segregation. Obviously, these forces never entirely disappeared in North Beach and Venice. Many bar and coffeehouse owners proved remarkably adept at exploiting the popularity of the beat generation, attiring their employees in black and hiring out-of-work poets to pose in store-front windows as bona-fide bohemians.[20] Moreover, while many heterosexual bohemians

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[18]Interview with Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 210-211, emphasis is Bhabha's.

[19]"The New Mediocrity," *Time*, 2 June 1958, 80.

[20]Frank Laro, "Tourists Chase Beatniks from L.A. Coffee Houses," *Los Angeles Mirror News*, 2 June 1959, sec. 2, p. 1; Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac,*

took the presence of gays and lesbians for granted, and queer poets proclaimed their sexual orientation in bars and cafes, homophobia also existed in urban countercultures and some gay bohemians struggled unsuccessfully to accept their sexuality. Furthermore, whites bohemians often mistook the presence of a few blacks in their favorite hangouts with the racial integration of bohemia. Yet African Americans always recognized that they remained a numerically small minority in bohemian districts like North Beach and Venice, and that some of their white counterparts were racially prejudiced. Finally, many bohemian men regarded artistic and literary creativity as a quintessentially male enterprise and assumed that women should fill conventional domestic roles as housekeepers and child rearers, and some women expressed contentment in subordinating themselves to the needs of male poets and painters.

However, bohemian enclaves legitimized the rejection of normative attitudes and behavior to an extent that was often difficult to sustain in other parts of the urban landscape. Many bar and coffeehouse owners emphasized not financial gain but rather the creation of public spaces in which artists and writers could share their work and reach broader audiences. Furthermore, homosexuals often gravitated to cafes and nightclubs where writers and artists congregated because such places were not regarded as exclusively gay or lesbian hangouts yet validated same-sex attraction and gender-inappropriate behavior. Similarly, many women asserted their intellectual equality and refused to succumb to the sexual and economic subordination that some male bohemians

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the Beat Generation, and America (New York: Random House, 1979), 277.

expected of them. Finally, many African Americans and whites regarded racial intermixing as an important feature of bohemian life, and some blacks concluded that racial bias was far less prevalent in bohemian enclaves than in other parts of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

This study also emphasizes the central role of the mass media in disseminating bohemianism into postwar popular culture. In the wake of obscenity charges against *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg and the instant success of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, the beatnik entered the fabric of postwar cultural life. Mass-media depictions of the beat generation simultaneously amplified and silenced the oppositional potential of bohemianism, portraying the beats dichotomously as apathetic and lazy misfits on the one hand or violent criminal psychopaths on the other. Yet the media also evidenced a deep ambivalence regarding postwar bohemians, seeming relieved that some Americans now publicly challenged the conformity of the 1950s yet disappointed that the U.S. produced such uncouth cultural insurgents. Moreover, audiences responded to media representations of the beats quite independently of the intentions of editors and Hollywood producers, often expressing an intense admiration and empathy for the beat generation as a harbinger of cultural rejuvenation.

Additionally, this study argues that postwar bohemians became politically conscious and active in response to harassment by law enforcement officials. Although there were relatively few African Americans in bohemian districts, white police, municipal authorities and conservative civic groups regarded racial intermixing in bars

and coffeehouses as a serious threat to racial integration, and they mounted campaigns to rid North Beach and Venice of bohemians. In response, bohemians organized to defend their access to public space, allying with the American Civil Liberties Union, forming neighborhood organizations to assist individuals who faced police harassment, and holding rallies and protest marches to draw attention to their cause and galvanize support. Although these efforts met with very limited success, they demonstrated that bohemians in the late 1950s and early 1960s were far from politically apathetic.

Ultimately, this study examines the cultural influence of avant-garde intellectuals in the postwar decades. Whatever one thinks of the literature of the beat generation, writers such as Ginsberg, Kerouac and Lipton helped disseminate adversarial assumptions and ways of life. The effect of such dissemination was especially noticeable in urban areas where writers, artists and musicians congregated. Obviously, the beat generation was neither the first nor the last instance in which this popularization occurred, as the notoriety of Greenwich Village in the 1910s, the "Harlemania" that lured whites to uptown Manhattan during the Harlem Renaissance, and the hippies all demonstrated.[21] Indeed, there were successive waves of public fascination with avant-garde intellectuals throughout the twentieth century, and the focal point of this interest was not only art and literature but moreover attitudes and behavior. Intellectuals resonated with the broader

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[21]On "Harlemania," see Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 103-109; and David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981, reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chaps. 6 and 7.

public not merely as poets and painters but as cultural rebels who were relevant to people who did not have artistic or literary aspirations. The beat generation constituted a crucial episode in this countercultural history.

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